Cyber-Proletariat and the New Subaltern Space

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Declaration of Authorship: I, Bangjia Joni Zhu hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

This research examines the condition of what has been called "cyber-proletariat" and the emergence of new subaltern spaces in globalised contemporary capitalism. It does so by engaging with the life of Tian Yu, who was 17-years-old when she worked as an iPad assembly worker at Foxconn in Shenzhen, China. In 2010, only 37 days into her initial employment, Tian Yu attempted suicide. While the Taiwanese electronic manufacturer Foxconn runs factories worldwide, the Shenzhen Longhua plant is the first and largest one, established in 1988. Shenzhen and the surrounding Pearl River Delta region are located in China's Guangdong Province north of Hong Kong and are known as the "workshop of the world". This is due to the industrialisation that took place in the 1980s, as well as the technological industries whose recent rise has been linked with processes of migration and rural depopulation.

By investigating China's socio-techno-economic development and its relation to cybernetic capital, this research recognises the constitution of a new subaltern space. This space is further examined by engaging with the singularity of Tian Yu's life, and through a reading of her suicide attempt as an act of resistance (against the backdrop of what has been labelled the Foxconn "Suicide Express"). Two lines of enquiry are of central importance in this context: first, an enquiry into the formation and conditions of the "cyber-proletariat", a term coined by Nick Dyer-Witheford in his analysis of the relation between cybernetic capital and class; and second, a discussion of the contemporary production of new subaltern spaces, which draws mainly on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's take on the concept of subaltern. This research takes 'to be removed from the lines of social mobility' as the point of departure for the recognition of Tian Yu's subalternity. Given that departure, this thesis analyses the processes of suablternisation and proletarianisation through singularity with a view of machinic conditioning of the cyber-proletariat.

Table of Contents

Introduction

'Internet technology and mobile communications has opened a window on the wealthy, wonderful city lifestyle for us. Almost all the young people of my age, including my school friends, had gone off to work, and I was excited to see the world outside too. Upon completing a course at the local vocational school, I decided to leave the province to seek new opportunities, with my parents' support.' [1]

– Tian Yu

This a story told by Tian Yu, who comes from a rural peasant family and migrated to Shenzhen – a city of 12-million population in China on the northern border of Hong Kong – to work for Foxconn when she was 17 years old. She attempted suicide by throwing herself from the fourth floor[2] of the dormitory building in Foxconn's Longhua plant in Shenzhen at about 8 AM on 17 March 2010, and survived. Tian Yu's suicide attempt happened after only 37 days of employment in her first job and has left her paralysed from the waist down. During the same year, 18 workers who assembled iPhones and iPads on the assembly line from Foxconn committed or attempted suicide at its factories and dormitories, with a minimum of 14 deaths, all of whom were young rural migrants in their late-teens to early twenties.

Foxconn International Holdings Ltd. was set up in 2000 by a Taiwanese manufacturer, Hon Hai Precision Industry Co., and is a multinational electronics contract manufacturing company which provides products, components and assembling for leading brands including Apple, Sony, Microsoft, Amazon, Dell and others. Foxconn has twelves factories in nine Chinese cities as well as factories in Brazil, Hungary, Slovakia, Turkey, Czech Republic, India, Japan, Malaysia and Mexico, and it has recently established its North American corporate headquarters in Wisconsin in the U.S. with a manufacturing plant to follow. Since 1988, Foxconn has built many factories in Southern China, at the heart of the nation's export-oriented development, an area where labour, environmental regulations

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[1] Jenny Chan, "A Suicide Survivor: The Life of A Chinese Worker", *New Technology, Work And Employment*, 28.2, 2013, pp84-99, p87

[2] It in fact equals to six storeys from ground level because the first two storeys are used as warehouses.

and enforcement were weak. Foxconn's first and largest manufacturing plant worldwide is in Longhua Town, Shenzhen, where Tian Yu and other hundreds of thousands of workers are employed within a walled campus referred to as "Foxconn City". The "city" has fifteen factory buildings, worker dormitories, canteens, swimming pools, a fire station, library book vending machines, grocery stores, a high street with restaurants, banks, mobile phone shops and Foxconn IE (Industrial Engineering) University. Hon Hai as a Transnational Corporation (TNC) produces about 85 percent of China's high-technology exports, largely destined for the North American market, creating a "triangular relationship" between capital in the United States, China and Taiwan. This kind of set up facilitates the international division of labour as well as the extreme exploitation of workers like Tian Yu through the demand of the consumers and the supply chain.

Tian Yu was successfully recruited by Foxconn on the first day of her arrival and was employed as a general assembly worker to inspect iPad screens. With the obligation to work overtime, Tian Yu worked a 12-hour shift each day with one day off every other week. She inspected the screen to see if there were any scratches then stuck a label on it and put it back on the line. She did this at the speed of 15 seconds per screen, repetitively, 2880 times every day, on the 24/7 non-stop assembly line.

After a month of working, Tian Yu was not paid. One day after she had finished her evening shift, she did not sleep during the day and went to the Guanlan plant where she was originally recruited by Foxconn to sort out her pay. She was not able to find the right department after spending the whole day in the enormous factory plant. She had two mobile phones, one had been stolen and the another one broke. So she could not contact her family. With no money left, Tian Yu had not had any food or water, and walked 9 miles back to her dormitory. Tian Yu returned back to her dormitory, she lay on her bed with the roommates coming in and out of the room, but no one went over to talk to her. Tian Yu could not sleep that night, she was furious.[3] The more she thought about her situation,

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[3] "One of The Two Survivors from the Foxconn Suicide Express: The End of the Year for Tian Yu", 24 January 2011, http://finance.ifeng.com/news/people/20110124/3277312.shtml [Accessed 29 May 2018]

the more furious she got, 'I was so desperate that my mind went blank'.[4] The next morning, Tian Yu did not know what to do and went to the fourth floor of her dormitory building and took the leap. After 12 days in a coma, she woke up to find that her body had become half-paralysed.[5]

My engagement with Tian Yu is led by an initial research interest in the notion of movement. Notion itself is a movement of thoughts. Movement in its manifold manifestations is what I am interested in. A political movement, a social movement, a musical movement, a bodily movement. Every movement is a complex whole. A movement of capital, a movement of technologies, a movement of emotions, a movement of people. I moved to the UK from China also when I was 17 years old to pursue an education in Fine Art. In 2010, the year when Tian Yu skipped sleep after an evening shift to search for her wage card in Guanlan, and didn't turn up for the next shift. I was searching for my iPhone 4 after everyone had left a rave under a railway arch, and went to work in a gallery straight after. The reason I am allowing myself to make such connection 10 years later is because I still remember very clearly how I felt after I couldn't find the phone. I was in despair. Through the attempt of trying to gain understanding of the disparity between Tian Yu's desperation and that of mine, I set this research in movement, which can be thought of as both what it is already and something else that it is not yet. Movement is the mode in which the future belongs to the present; it is the present absence of those particular absent things which are about to be. The research brings about the future that belongs to the present, it is about the question of the future. It not only captures the conditions, but also the future of the conditions. It moves around the (socially) immobilised in the hope that one day the immobilised could be itself be set in motion in the future and thus the space it occupies will be dissolved.

I recall one of my first curatorial engagements, which was centred on creative resistance, and which responded to the conventional formats of exhibiting, discoursing, spectating, publicising, publishing. My reminiscence of this project is not only focused on its subject

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[4] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p91
[5] Ibid.

matter, but also on the time I spent looking through boxes and boxes of archived photographs of historical uprisings, concerning May 1968 events in particular. The boxes of archives were informative and responded to my quest at the time, but after all this time, I understand better now what archive means. As a notion, the archive raises concerns, not a question of the past, but the future. Jacques Derrida wrote in *Archive Fever* that the question of archive 'is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow.'[6] The future which the archive presented to me was the present future of the conditions that we have been and will be living through. In this sense, the slight touch of the understanding of the curatorial produced at the time lingers with me, with no defined shape or form, but revolving and evolving through time. And this futurity of the archive indeed lies within the potentiality of the curatorial. In order to grasp the curatorial, it requires enquiring by moving the curatorial together with knowledge – the kinds of knowledge that can potentially be produced to elucidate the conditions which we are living in and concerned with – in order for our reason to start working.

This thesis is however not about building an archive. Rather, it looks at a certain archive in a sense of engaging with Tian Yu's life and the conditions around it. It is about the element of the question of the future in the notion of "archive". In contemporary conditions, what is the kind of future that the present future presents? Since politico-economic conditions have been putting cultural production through the various modes of conditioning, it is apparent that the neoliberal regime has been dominating the way we work. As I began to work more in my home country China, I witnessed the number of resources that are available to artists through foundations and private museums, in contrast to the UK arts funding cuts, resulting from the 2008 financial crisis. The subsequent social movements that emerged in response to the crisis, despite the on-the-ground physical occupations, were mostly mobilised through digital media. This raises the question of the forms of resistance that are taking place within the globalised cybernetic capital. I began to research into social movements such as the anti-sweatshop movement,

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[6] Jacques Derrida, trans. Eric Prenowitz, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*"*, *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (summer 1995), pp. 9-63, p27

which aims to run the supply chain backwards and to make visible the connections between exploitation through production in the global South and consumption in the global North: this eventually led me to Tian Yu.

It seems that China's market was not disturbed by the Great Recession of the late 2000s as much as some other parts of the world, due to the state implementation of the stimulus package that involved building physical infrastructure to pump up its GDP growth from capex. But the crisis did result in the collapse of tens of thousands of factories in those two years, exposing the Chinese economic model in its dependency on the export sector, something that hit the Chinese migrant workers particularly hard. And the year of 2010 – with the incidents at Foxconn labelled as "Suicide Express" – was the post-crisis year when all the major global tech players including Apple and Foxconn pushed hard to maximise profit in order to make up their losses in the Great Recession. After all, the global economic state needed to be resuscitated first, before the building of infrastructure that is able to attend to the rural migrants who were holding up the economy. The state is now run to manage the global cybernetic economy. '"Rule of law" arises because the barriers between national capital and global capital are removed'[7], says Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who is one of the key references in this thesis. This implies that every citizen is subject to the global capital laws, and signifies the subsumption of national capital under global capital to produce governance by "rule of law", the rule of the unconstituted global law. It is the law of the same system of exchange being established everywhere. The state is now managerial, rather than its role being to look after its citizens. And this concept of "rule of law" has nothing to do with constitution.

Having completed my previous higher education in British art schools, my methodology thus lacks a situated discipline. An initial approach was instigated through constant questioning, investigating and re-entering, then lead to researches conducted across all fields rather than in one prescribed discipline, which is to be called a curatorial research

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[7] Keynote Address by Spivak at University of KwaZulu Natal in 2014. Teaching & Learning TV by UTLO, "TLHEC8 – Keynote Addressed by Prof Gayatri Spivak", *Youtube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukvvL5UMa-A [Accessed 29 May 2018]

practice. In dealing with Tian Yu's narrative, I must respond to what Spivak calls the need to 'suspend my own consciousness', so that the 'elaboration of the insurgency, packaged with an insurgent-consciousness, does not freeze in an "object of investigation", or, worse yet, a model for imitation'[8]. I did not interview Tian Yu, and I do not treat her as a case study. My reading of the singularity of a life relies on materials that are published by researchers who visited her and including books, journals, filmed interviews, as well as online interviews conducted by journalists that have been following Tian Yu's life since 2010. By engaging with the singularity of Tian Yu's life, this research is able to consider the processes of conditioning that produces Tian Yu's subjectivity.

As a key reference, this research draws on Spivak as a main source for conceptual content, as well as on a methodological level. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak addresses that 'the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive'.[9] I kept this in mind as I developed the project, to not analyse the migrant women's experiences through the concepts of power and desire, as well as notions of docility and governmentality. Nor does this research conflate desire and (social) interest, such as finding out the peasants' interest in mobilising consciousness. That way of working with the migrant women's subjectivities would render the socio-economic development transparent, without actually analysing the workings of the investigated subject matter. To reintroduce the constitutive subject through the Subject of desire and power is what Spivak calls an "irreducible methodological presupposition".[10]

Spivak problematises this statement made by Gilles Deleuze in his conversation with Michel Foucault in relation to workers' struggle and the Subject of power and desire.

> 'We are unable to touch [power] in any point of its application without finding ourselves confronted by this diffuse mass, so that we are necessarily led … to the desire to blow it up completely. Every partial

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[8] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (University of Illinois Press, 1988), p287
[9] Ibid. p272
[10] Ibid. p279

revolutionary attack or defense is linked in this way to the workers'

struggle.'

She argues that Deleuze's statement of the link to the workers' struggle is located in the desire to blow up power and comments: 'This site is apparently based on a simple valorization of *any* desire destructive of *any* power.'[11] Here, the Subject of the West (or the West as Subject) has "no geo-political determination".[12]

Spivak's work on subaltern and Nick Dyer-Witheford's work on cyber-proletariat are the two main conceptual motifs which this research is taking on. The term subaltern contains the specific sense of describing 'to be removed from the lines of social mobility'.[13] And the term cyber-proletariat address the effect of cybernetics on the restructuring of labour within globalised capitalism. These form the conceptual framework that helps this research to problematise the conditions which Tian Yu lives through. Tian Yu's singular life is conditioned by a technology of government that is cybernetics. This is a specific use of the term of cybernetics, that is not a separate sphere of the production of information and communication, a virtual space superimposed on the real world. Rather, it is an autonomous world of apparatuses so blended with the capitalist project that it has become a political project, a new form of political sovereignty.[14] It is a machine that constantly puts the workers of the cybernetic capital into service. A constellation of machines including China's economic machine, and Foxconn as a social machine produces subaltern subjectivity through a series of new conditioning. Cybernetics thus is understood not only in terms of economic conditions, but also social conditions.

The lives of young migrant workers are controlled, displaced and atomised through the social conditioning at Foxconn. As Tian Yu recalls,

'We were not close. Random dormitory reassignments break up friendships, increasing our isolation. Although eight girls were housed in

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[11] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p272

[12] Ibid.

[13] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), p430

[14] Tiqqun, "Chapter 1", *The Cybernetic Hypothesis*, http://cybernet.jottit.com/chapter_1 [Accessed 14 April 2020]

the same room, we were strangers to each other. Some of us had just moved in as others moved out. None of the roommates was from Hubei'.[15] When Tian Yu first came to Shenzhen, sometimes when others spoke, she couldn't understand much because of the different dialects everyone speaks. With no friends, Tian Yu was isolated even more by the rotating day and night shifts. On top of this, there is the absence of a real worker's union at Foxconn. In 2003, the Chinese government was promoting a unionisation campaign focused on private and foreign-invested companies. Foxconn, no different to many other foreign-invested firms, evaded its basic responsibilities and failed to set up a trade union to aid in workers' communication with the company management. After the Chinese governments across many different levels directly intervened in the setting up of a union, Foxconn who entered Shenzhen in 1988, finally set up a trade union at the Longhua plant only on the last day of 2006. However, Terry Gou who is the founder, chairman and general manager took immediate control over the newly formed union by appointing his special personal assistant Chen Peng to become the chairwoman of the union. With no surprise, the Foxconn Trade Union failed to investigate the work place conditions responsible for the high levels of workers' stress and depression. Instead, the union made public comments on the workers' suicide: 'suicide is foolish, irresponsible and meaningless and should be avoided'.[16] The Foxconn Trade Union is a company union, and has failed to protect workers' rights and dignity. Over 90 per cent of the 1.4 million employees had registered as members of the union;[17] like the 260 million rural migrant workers toiling in large and small workplaces throughout China, Foxconn workers had no infrastructure through which they could protect their rights or engage in collective bargaining. It was not until after Tian Yu's suicide attempt in March 2010, that Foxconn installed an internal telephone helpline at work. But workers could not speak confidentially to the company-run counselling service without having their identity reported directly to the management.

Cyber-proletariat shares no feelings of community amongst themselves under the factory regime and different realities. Dyer-Witheford purposes the cyber-proletariat as the new

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[15] Hubei is where Tian Yu comes from. Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p90
[16] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p93
[17] Ibid.

global working class who struggle along the entire capitalist commodity chain. The term cyber-proletariat raises questions not only about the assembly-line electronics workers like Tian Yu, the call centre operative, but also the former peasant populations plucked off the land without necessarily being able to find employment, as well as labour ejected from production by cybernetic automation and communication.[18] In this context, it is important to highlight the technological implications of China's socio-economy through the workings of global cybernetic capital. The thesis addresses the conditionings produced by cybernetics, which manifest itself in the Internet, ICT (information and communications technology) and the digital economy. The concept cyber-proletariat allows for the research to identify the subjective position of a generation of labouring bodies who grow up with the Internet, work to facilitate cybernetic circulation, and are turned into an economic subject. Cyber-proletariat, as Dyer-Witheford suggests, is to read class as pertaining to a 'position in the vampire food chain'; to read class struggle as 'the battle against vampires', and to read class and cybernetics as 'vampires – but perhaps also vampire-slayers – with smartphones'[19].

The inability to recognise one's resistance as discussed by Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", is relevant to my discussion on the lives that rode the "Suicide Express". The subaltern lives are cut off from the lines of social mobility. And this cut-off is a movement away from the possibility of movement that is social mobility. There are no two of the same movements in the production of the subaltern subject. Subaltern is not a self-claimable identity such as the industrial proletariat from the old days. It is a position. Through the accounting for Tian Yu's singular life and reading of her resistance, this thesis analyses the different configurations and distinctive aspects of subalternity under today's socio-economic conditionings produced by the machine. It is concerned with the global cybernetic production and circulation that maintains the new subaltern women in a position of subalternity. The thesis focuses on the processes of conditioning, which facilitate the constitution of the new subaltern space. 'All concepts in which an entire process is comprehended […] withdraw(s) itself from […] definition; only that which has

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[18] Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat: Global Labour in The Digital Vortex*, (London: Pluto Press, 2015), p13
[19] Ibid. p9

no history is definable.'[20] Being subalternised, being proletarianised take place in time, and therefore has history. Definitions place things outside of time, by circumscribing boundary.

Chapter one begins with a historical account of China's development which traces three lines of movement that grasp where Tian Yu was at (her background in relation to China's recent socio-economic development), how she decided on her particular course of action (the reasons behind the migration and the consequences), and what led her to attempt suicide (the factory's working conditions). The chapter operates in the tension between Shenzhen Dream and Shenzhen Realism, and questions the history of Shenzhen which is seemingly "no history". It draws on Tian Yu's experience in Foxconn in parallel to the hopes and the dreaming life of Shenzhen which are presented as conditions, in order to picture the lived experience of Tian Yu.

By following the transformations of labour identity of the rural migrant worker, the chapter discusses the concept of cyber-proletariat, its conditions, the devices produced and the mutated perception of class. Through analysing the conception of subaltern and its existing traits, the key objective of the chapter is to establish an understanding of the terminology for it to be further worked within subsequent chapters. It specifically focuses on subalternity as a space, and reads Tian Yu's suicide attempt against Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's suicide in 1926, as discussed in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to point out the situationality of subalternity. The chapter situates subaltern within the narrative of international subcontracting and begins a discussion on the exploitation of subaltern.

In chapter two, the question is elaborated from 'who is the subaltern?' to 'what kind of becoming of the new subaltern is this?' The emergence of the new subaltern is discussed through the emergence of global capitalism, where export-based international subcontracting maintains the contemporary international division of labour by keeping

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[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, trans., Walter J. Kaufmann, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p77,80. The above is Spivak's modification of the quote. Also see, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" in *In Other Worlds*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), p273

the supply of cheap labour in the periphery, the global South. The chapter sets out the scene for the emergence of new subaltern through a process of subalternisation by addressing neocoloniality, the Development project, the coinage of the third word, the UN's project of International feminist politics. It discusses the contemporary production of new subaltern spaces in relation to the social and economic conditionings that are produced by the machine. In this context, the concept of machinic enslavement seems particularly relevant to address the blurred distinction between contemporary production and consumption produced by constantly putting one into service, which in turn becomes a part of the new configurations of subalternity.

The chapter as well as the thesis are organised by specifically placing the discussion on the notion of singularity at the centre, which allows me to return to Tian Yu again and again. By allowing the singularity of Tian Yu's life to occupy such a central place, I am able to put myself in dialogue with her to discuss the whole project through a theoretical framework. It enables me to critically think of her through the notion of singularity that is the one life. And to always remember that I am writing with regards to the one life which was brought into crisis. The middle of chapter two act as a hinge for the whole thesis, articulating the notion of singularity in relation to machine, and clarifying the theoretical framework with a view of boarder conditioning.

Chapter three continues to follow a process of conditioning through proletarianisation that is interrelated to subalternisation. The proletarianisation of *nongmingong* looks at the position of new subaltern within a class structure in China. Since Foxconn alone produces 50% of the world's computers and iPhones[21], China is not only connected to digital supply chains but also makes the computers that link those chains. The chapter deals with the conditionings produced by the process of proletarianisation that apply to all through the understanding of cyber-proletariat. However, it focuses more on the process of conditioning in a machinic sense.

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[21] David Harvey, "Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: The Conditions of Labor in China", *Youtube*, 14/03/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xfvx0Ll2IE [Accessed 23 April, 2020]

The chapter addresses the cybernetic circulation within which the supply chain operates to consider the different stages of consumerist models and the construction of the digital economy that produces the modes of production. Through sustaining a continuous dialogue with Tian Yu's life since she had returned home and started a new job, the chapter addresses proletarianisation through the digital economy. By putting emphasis on the two dimensions of proletarianisation, the chapter analyses the processes of conditioning of both the producer and the consumer. Specifically, through the transformation and destruction of memory in contemporary consumerism, the proletariansed consumer is a new reality for all.

'You know, when the assembly line starts moving, you literally work non-stop.'[22] Tian Yu worked at Foxconn from 8th February to 17th March 2010. And the first generation of iPad was released on 3rd April 2010.

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[22] Tian Yu's testimony. Jack Linchuan Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave: A Manifesto for Digital Abolition* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2016), p84

1. Lines of Movement

Introduction

Tian Yu comes from a village called Denggang in Menglou town, Laohekou city, Xiangyang, Hubei province, in Central China. There is one coach that goes to Menglou town from Xiangyang every day. Tian Yu's village farms rice and wheat, and during the slack season, Tian Yu's father works on construction sites in the cities because farming provides the family with very little income, about 15,000 Yuan ($2,400 USD) in a year. And this is not untypical: in the village, people who are younger than Tian Yu's father do not usually know how to farm; the adults who are in their 40s mostly work on constructions sites in cities while the youth who are in their 20s mostly work in electronics factories in Guangdong province.[23]

Smart technology and electronics assembly workers are identified as the cyber-proletariat by Nick Dyer-Witheford, whose work focuses on the analysis of labour in relation to globalised cybernetic capitalism. In *Cyber-Proletariat, Global Labour in the Digital Vortex*, Dyer-Witheford focuses the effect of cybernetics on the restructuring of labour within globalised capitalism, and recognises the cyber-proletariat as the new global working class who struggles along the entire capitalist commodity chain. The restructuring of labour as a result of the global economy and the representation of free market ideologies has complicated the ways in which class is understood, and has led us to a point where our ability to even perceive class has been diminishing.

In 2010, Foxconn Longhua plant alone has an estimated workforce of 420,000 employees yet the company does not provide its employees a living wage, appropriate working conditions or adequate benefits.[24] Excessive overtime, high levels of work-related stress, and disrespect for workers' rights to union representation is built into the Foxconn management system. The Foxconn assembly lines run strictly on a 24-hour non-stop basis with rotating day and night shifts, which makes it difficult for the workers to rest, and with

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[23] Kong Lingjun, "Seven Years Since Shenzhen Foxconn Survivor Tian Yu Went Home", Shanghai Observer, 28/07/2012, https://www.jfdaily.com/news/detail?id=60530 [Accessed 5 April 2020]
[24] Pete Brook, "Inside Foxconn City: A Vast Electronics Factory Under Suicide Scrutiny", 2010, https://www.wired.com/2010/11/thomas-lee-foxconn/ [Accessed: 21 August 2018]

roommates working different shifts, it is hard for them to socialise. Dormitory assignments are planned specifically with no two people from the same region living in the same room, so everyone speaks different regional dialects which cannot be easily comprehended by outsiders. It was impossible for Tian Yu to find people from her home region and establish friendships. Tian Yu's suicide is an act of subaltern insurgency, by which her subalternity has been brought to a point of crisis. She was removed by the factory regime from lines of mobility. Scholars like Pun Ngai identify Chinese female migrant worker subjects as subaltern, those who 'embod[y] the dual process of domination and resistance'[25]. But the term "subaltern" in some existing literature on this subject is used rather routinely with a fixed conception and often generalised.

The concept of cyber-proletariat and the subaltern group can be easily read as social categories, but the complexities brought by these two terms are set out in this chapter by considering Chinese historicity and narratives, the formation of the worker subject, and the conception of subaltern. This chapter can be read as an exposition movement that presents the primary thematic materials within the composition of the whole project. It consolidates the ground from which movements within chapter two and three can take off. It provides firm understandings of the terminologies that are paraphrased throughout the research, as well as preliminary discussions that will be continued in later chapters in relation to the specificities of the project.

In parallel to Tian Yu's recall of her time at Foxconn, this chapter is constructed in three lines of movement. Lines of movement I focuses on what led to Tian Yu's migration to Shenzhen through moving through the history of the Chinese peasantry to China's socio-economic development that includes rural reform as well as economic reform. Lines of movement II looks at the formation of female migrant worker subjects, which will be illustrated by moving through terms such as *dagongmei*, cybertariat and cyber-proletariat. Terms such as cybertariat and cyber-proletariat lead to an analysis of cybernetic capital working conditions and discuss their relation to class, whereas *dagongmei* are names

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[25] Pun Ngai, *Made In China: Women Factory Workers In A Global Workplace* (Duke University Press, 2005), p15

people use to refer to the working girls as a governance mechanism. With the question of 'what makes one subaltern?', Lines of movement III traces of the conception of the subaltern by looking at the works of Gramsci, the Subaltern Studies Group and Spivak in order to think through the different aspects of subalternity.

1.1. Lines of Movement I

1.1.1. The Revolutionary Movement

The "world outside" for Tian Yu was the urban city in which her parents, seasonal migrant workers, would have worked since she and her siblings were little. For the past three decades, hundreds of millions of rural migrants have left their home and farmland to look for work in the cities, leaving their children behind. 'Nothing is less passive than the act of fleeing, of exiting'[26]: Paolo Virno follows this up by purposing for the contemporary multitude to exit or defect from the state bond; the Chinese peasantry are exiting their land to enter the labour market and factories. And the year when the autonomists were imprisoned is the same year that China began to open itself up to the global market. In the next section, the history of the formation of rural socialism up to the initial rural-to-urban movement will be recounted.

Following the liberation of China in 1949, after fourteen years of the Sino-Japanese war, land was seized from the land owners and distributed among the poor peasants. The process of land redistribution was daunting: land owners were put on public trials where peasant farmers were given the opportunity to express their anger and sorrow about past injustices at the "Speaking Bitterness" sessions. Peasants were encouraged, and in some cases obliged to tell their story and express their *ku* (bitterness – sufferings)[27]. The land owners who failed to answer particular questions were often subjected to insults or beatings; of those land owners who resisted giving up their land, some were executed. "Speaking Bitterness" was exercised as a form of oral historical writing to recall the

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[26] Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext[e], 2004), p70

[27] "Speaking Bitterness", *Alpha History*, http://alphahistory.com/chineserevolution/speak-bitterness/ [Accessed 15 July 2018]

experiences and memories of the peasantry and thus functioned as a way to politicise the peasants' memories, to raise their own laboring class consciousness, leading to an enactment of class struggle. These sessions were emotionally charged, emotions as described by Baruch Spinoza as "wavering of the mind" that can either increase or diminish one's power to act[28]. As Elizabeth Perry points out, 'attention to the emotional dimensions of mass mobilization was a key ingredient in the Communists' revolutionary victory'.[29] "Speaking Bitterness" thus helped to catalyze ideological indoctrination and perpetuate the revolution of the Chinese Communist Party, as well as reinforce the land reform and redistribution programme.

Upon receiving the land, the peasants were recalled as being enthusiastic about farming, and helped each other when encountering difficulties during production. The state thought this enthusiasm was driven by two aspects: one was the individual economic factor, and the other was through the cooperation between the peasants. The state saw these two aspects would inevitably lead the rural region development towards either capitalism or socialism, so mutual-aid cooperatives were formed in order to lead the peasants towards socialism.[30] By 1956, the cooperatives and rural collective ownership were established, meaning peasants were gathered to work together and the earnings were distributed back to the peasants according to their work. At the same time, the socialist transformation of the means of production owned by the state was basically completed - all means were then state-owned and private ownership of the land was illegal.

William Hinton narrated the peasants' experience of the commune in his 1983 book *Shenfan: The Continuing Revolution in a Chinese Village.* In this book, Hinton examines the consequences of land reform carried out in a Chinese village called Long Bow, and

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[28] Sianne Ngai quotes Spinoza, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p2

[29] Liu Yu quotes Elizabeth Perry, "Maoist Discourse and the Mobilization of Emotions on Revolutionary China", *Modern China*, Vol 36, No. 3, May 2010, pp. 329-362, p330. See also Elizabeth Perry, Moving The Masses: Emotion Work In The Chinese Revolution. Mobilization: An International Quarterly: June 2002, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 111-128

[30] Kong Zhixiang and Liu Tongshan, "Basic Management System in Rural Regions: Theoretical Evaluation and Practical Choice" December 10, 2013. http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/1210/c40531-23800719.html.

addresses the ways in which Long Bow peasants learnt to work together as well as taking part in the Leap Forward. As a farmer himself, Hinton had previously spent some time at Long Bow in the 1940s, contributing to the technical transformation of agriculture in the village. His first book was called *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village,* which was published in 1966 and based on the years he spent at the village.

"*Fanshen*" means turn over: it witnesses the process of rural reform and social change in the village. Hinton argued that Mao's aim was to create political awareness among the peasants. "*Fanshen*" literally means "to turn the body over", that is, to change the way of thinking and join the revolution; to overthrow the land owners, superstition and to study science.[31] The second book, *Shenfan,* whose name was taken from a word commonly used in the Chinese rural regions, and means 'deep tillage, deep plowing, a deep and thorough overturning of the soil'. Between the completion of the fall harvest and the onset of winter, the peasants worked side by side, armed with spades or mattocks, turning the earth in preparation for next year's planting. The peasants believed that the deeper they dug into the earth, turning both soil and subsoil, the more grain they would reap. They also believed that without machinery, they must depend on their own hands to turn the soil as deeply as possible, in order to lay the foundation for a bountiful harvest. The word *Shenfan* thus stood for the vast, grass-root movement to increase farm production during the Great Leap Forward in 1958. The symbolic meaning of *Shenfan* suggests 'all the painstaking effort peasants were willing to make once they owned their own land, and it can express the hope they have for their land.' In addition, it implies 'the spirit of the cooperative movement by means of which people, working together, try to fashion a new way of life on ancient fields'.[32]

In the preface of *Shenfan*'s Chinese version, Hinton noted at the time that there seemed to be an inclination to deny this collective movement and sees it as 'negligence, extreme

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[31] William Hinton, *Fanshen: Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), vii

[32] William Hinton, *Shenfan: The Continuing Revolution in a Chinese Village*, (New York: Random House, 1983) xiiii

left, historic mistakes'[33]. Hinton noticed that Chinese theorists of the land ownership system were proposing that the waiting time between planting and harvesting was too long for the farmer to imagine how their personal efforts would feed into the future under the collective organisation. Hence, the peasants were not motivated, which resulted in low production and low reward for themselves. In the end, collective farming, once seen as the road to salvation, was referred to as "eating out of one big pot" - a euphemism for sharing poverty. These theorists also claimed that since the amounts that were distributed back to the peasants was very little, everyone received equal pay and therefore were all poor, and this theory seemed to have become the "truth". Another claim made by these theorists was that the adoption of collective farming was forced by the party cadre, as an order imposed on the peasants. The collectivisation movement that later developed into the commune was deemed to be the dogmatist's dream, since certain theories were imposed onto the peasants that did not reflect the real needs and desire of the peasants.

Although Chinese peasantry were no longer dominated by the landowners, it was still slippery to attend to them through the inadequate representation of their experience; "eating out of one big pot" seems to indicate that there is no evidence for their unity except for the experience of sharing poverty. Spivak breaks down the two senses of representation that run alongside each other: 'Darstellung – representation as "speaking for", as in politics, and Vertretung – representation as "re-presentation", as in art of philosophy'[34]. Here, "eating out of one big pot" seems like representation as Vertretung, but it actually operates as Darstellung, as policies on land reform were later drafted based on the representation of the peasantry's experiences. Hinton's narration of Long Bow village thus provides the empirical work that overturns the two arguments by giving a detailed account of the difficulties Long Bow encountered during the process of collectivisation, such as absence of good leadership due to a lack of training; the poor implementation of policies, and other bureaucratic involvement. The party cadres did not seem to have paved the way for the peasantry as it should have been to facilitate

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[33] The preface for Shenfan's Chinese version, which was written by Hinton in June 1993. "Shenfan", *Douban*, https://book.douban.com/subject/3142323/ [Accessed 25 August 2018]
[34] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p256

collectivisation. Indeed, the Chinese peasantry did occupy a subordinated position and were mobilised and politicised by the party to participate in the subsequent revolutions.

Long Bow is the kind of village that had already linked up with suburbia: the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) exploded in the village within a few hours after it first surfaced in Beijing, and it dominated the community for years. Throughout those years, the village transformed from a typical isolated Chinese countryside in the 1940s to a rapidly changing industrial outskirts of the nations' burgeoning cities in the early 1980s. *Shenfan* ends in the fall of 1971 at the time of deep crisis, both locally and nationally. And Long Bow is 'somewhat closer to the essence of what is happening in China as a whole than any pristine farming village can claim to be'.[35] Although other rural villages would have had different experiences with their own narratives during the ten years of political turmoil, the result of this was that the peasantry became estranged from the land and left agriculture in deep crisis. 'As "class struggle" alarms fanned up new confrontations, the common people dragged their feet into the new decade.'[36]

1.1.2. Reform

Until 1978, most of the agricultural sector was organised according to the three-tier commune system: the people's commune, the higher cooperative and the production team. Within the commune, the peasants worked together on farm land, lived together in dormitories and ate together in canteens. To contract collective land to individual farming was not allowed. However, the population had grown while food was in short supply and required large numbers of imports. The production teams relied on reimbursement to feed themselves, and relied on loans for production, while their living costs relied on relief, and the masses lost confidence in the collective.[37] Thus, the reform programme was launched, in the hope of lifting the country out of poverty.

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[35] Hinton, *Shenfan*, xviii
[36] Ibid. xvii
[37] Kong and Liu, "Basic Management System in Rural Regions"

In *The Course of China's Rural Reform*, Du Runsheng[38], who drafted the policy of rural reform, pointed out that the land reform was facilitated by a deep crisis since China's economy was in difficulty. In 1978, the Central committee of China's Communist Party reestablished,

> 'the emancipation of the mind, the intellectual approach of seeking truth from facts, and the materialist philosophy proposition [means] that practice is the sole standard of truth. It acknowledged that socialism means development of the productive forces, moving together toward wealth. The policy of making class struggle the key link was abolished, and the focus of Party work shifted to modernization.'[39]

The phrases "seeking truth from facts" and "practice is the sole standard of truth" is in a way insisting that practice is the production of theory, and that truth is sought from experiences. For Du, the truth lies in the fact that the nation could not feed itself. When Du first proposed the household responsibility system which would break the commune by contracting land to individual households for production, he was criticised for forsaking Mao's principle. The English preface for *Shenfan* was written in 1982, which was during the time when China was undergoing rural reform. Hinton ended the preface with a critique on rural reform, namely, it was pushing hard for new production systems which stressed material incentive as the cure-all, over-throwing the cooperative dream.

For Du, the emancipation of the mind meant to move away from the ideology path that China had been following since the victory of the Chinese Revolution. One thing we must note is that communist China did not overthrow capitalism within China: the victory was

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[38] Du Runsheng held the post of secretary general, Rural Work Department, in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee at the time the nation was founded. Concurrently he was deputy director of the Agriculture and Forestry Department of the State Council. After the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP (1978), he held the post of director, Rural Policy of the CCP Central Committee, and director of the Rural Department, Research Centre for Rural Development (RCRD), State Council, where he was mainly responsible for China's rural economic reforms and development policy research. Du was often asked by the leadership to draft rural-related policy documents for the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council. He worked in particular on the drafting of "No. 1 Documents," which were issued continuously for five years by the CCP Central Committee, and which made outstanding theoretical and practical contributions, deepening rural economic reform and setting up the rural household contract responsibility system that advanced the market reform of the rural economy.

[39] Du Runsheng, "The Course of China's Rural Reform" in *Narratives of Chinese Economic Reforms*, ed. Zhang Xiaobo (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Company, 2010), p17

the banishing of the Japanese imperialist. Hence, the class struggle was practised against the feudal landlords and petty bourgeoisie. During the Cultural Revolution, key words in the Marxist lexicon were misused to a point where they became vicious betrayals of principle as Hinton noted. The "proletariat" meant me and my friends; the "bourgeoisie" meant you and your friends. To "make revolution" meant for me to take power, and if you took power that would be "counter-revolution". Whoever held power for however briefly was able to use these words to justify the plan and action.[40]

Du thought the holding of resources by the state appeared to be unfair as these interests tended to be conservative, which held back reform in the name of socialist ownership. 'Institutional economics speaks of institutional "path dependencies"'[41]: the Chinese system depended on socialism with the system of public ownership and there was fear that things would fall into chaos if following that path was stopped. Thus, the adoption of Du's household responsibility system policy indicated the breaking off the continuation with the previous institutionalised ideology of class struggle, and saw a focus on "institutional innovation" with an outlook of institutional reform. All of these changes lifted people from the previous ideological and institutional environment, which created the possibility of finding a new environment.

Since then, the household responsibility system was slowly carried out, at first in limited and hardship regions, without abandoning the people's communes altogether so as to prevent resistance. The implementation of a production responsibility system within a household responsibility system enabled people who opposed the change to accept it.[42] Du's policy was seen as a necessary measure to solve the problem of impoverishment and gave the peasantry a sense of responsibility. It allowed them to farm their own plots and feed themselves, to grow whatever they liked for themselves as long as they met their grain quotas. Du believed that the peasant farmers should be allowed to choose for

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[40] Hinton, *Shenfan*, xv
[41] Du, "The Course of China's Rural Reform", p17
[42] Ibid. p19

themselves; their choices should be respected, and they should not be forced to adapt a top-down model[43].

It was made clear during the National Rural Working Conference in 1981, that the household system was different to the formerly privately-owned and individual economy. Instead, it should be a part of the socialist agroeconomy, as 'the self-perfection of the socialist system'[44]. The household system was then allowed to practise legally and the land was contracted to individual households on the basis of the public ownership of the land. Although the peasants could not own the land formally, they could lease it and rent it out, hire in labour and even sell surpluses that were produced over and above the commune target at free market rather than state-controlled prices.[45] The contractual relationship between the peasants and the collective replaced the unified collective management by the people's communes. By the end of the 1980s, the communes had been totally dissolved and transitioned to collective organisations to manage the peasants, as well as providing the peasants with technical services, operation services and necessary management services. This measure facilitated agricultural and rural areas to develop rapidly, resulting in an increase of rural income.

However, five years later, the rural income stagnated. The reasons are, firstly, the function of the agricultural collective service had weakened, as the types of services offered were lacking. Postpartum services were relatively weak, and the social services that were provided were mostly spontaneously offered to the peasants. Much of the attention from collective organisations was paid to agricultural social services; little were planned to provide services to rural households. All this lack of services from collective organisations hindered the adoption of modern agricultural technology and the improvement of agricultural productivity. Secondly, the rural land ownership system could not meet the needs of further development of agriculture. Whether the land was collectively owned by village or town or state, the definition of the collective was unclear; hence rural land ownership was unclear. The instability of land ownership caused various violations of

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[43] Kong and Liu, "Basic Management System in Rural Regions"
[44] Du, "The Course of China's Rural Reform", p21
[45] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p126

peasants' rights and interests since land reform. Peasants were given usage rights rather than holding title to the land, which made them become easily dispossessed if the land converted to lucrative urban uses by local officials and business. This left some peasants with little or no rural base for a livelihood, forcing them off the land and into the labour market.[46]

1.1.3. Migration

'If revolution, socialism, and Maoist democracy is the ultimate negation of the bourgeois project of industrialization and nation-building before 1949, then Deng's New Era is a negation of the Maoist paradigm by means of Weberian rationalization, which leads logically to a market economy under the supervision of the bureaucratic state.'[47]

Subsequently, Deng Xiaoping who took power after Mao's death in 1976 announced that the economic reform programme was willing to trade off limited control of the state over economics (though he was unwilling to loosen the political grip as with the 1989 Tiananmen incident). The reform happened coincidently with the neoliberal turn in the capitalist countries that suffered from the 1979 Global recession. This resulted in the construction of a particular kind of Chinese market economy which incorporates neoliberal elements interdigitated with authoritarian centralised control. During the reform, Deng focused on "four modernisations": in agriculture, industrial education, science and defence. Market pricing was introduced to stimulate competition between state-owned firms, and at the same time the country opened up to foreign trade and investments under strict state supervision. Initially, experimentation was mainly limited to Guangdong Province, close to Hong Kong, as seen in the city of Shenzhen which had evolved from a tiny fishing village to the manufacturing center for the world.

'By taking its own peculiar path towards 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' or, as some now prefer to call it, 'privatization with Chinese

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[46] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p146

[47] Zhang Xudong, "Postmodernism and Post-Socialist Society Cultural Politics in China After the New Era", *New Left Review*, September-October 1999, pp.77-105, p81

characteristics', it managed to construct a form of state-manipulated market economy that delivered spectacular economic growth (averaging close to 10 per cent a year) and rising standards of living for a significant proportion of the population for more than twenty years. But the reforms also led to environmental degradation, social inequality, and eventually something that looks uncomfortably like the reconstitution of capitalist class power.'[48]

During the two decades between the mid-1980s and 2004, state development plans had bankrupted remote rural areas that experienced massive labour outflows, large numbers of young and middle-aged rural migrant workers had left for more prosperous coastal cities to seek work, due to the urban-biased economic model. In the meantime, local governments encouraged rural residences to move to urban-industrial districts through "poverty alleviation" projects and left behind the building of the local rural economy.[49] The migrant workers since have become an important part of urban social groups, experiencing the deep and rapid social transformation of Chinese society that has changed from an agricultural and state socialist mode of production to an industrial and capitalist mode of production. Rural residences were the least privileged and were kept separated from urban residences by way of *hukou* – a residency permit system, which conferred many welfare benefits and rights to the urban populations while denying them to the rural populations.

Henceforth, the politics of labour identity in China became linked not only to industrialisation but also to a distinctive urban-rural dichotomy. This labour force is vulnerable to super-exploitation, and upon entering the factory, the production regime only wanted individuals to be responsible to themselves: they should learn to compete with each other but not to help each other like the way they did in village life.[50] The rural regions were thus being left behind while the urban cities prospered with the economic

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[48] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p122

[49] Jenny Chan, Pun Ngai, "Suicide as Protest for the New Generation of Chinese Migrant Workers: Foxconn, Global Capital, and the State", *The Asia-Pacific Journal,* Vol. 8, Issue 37, No. 2, September 2010, p4

[50] Pun Ngai, "Becoming Dagongmei (Working Girls): The Politics of Identity and Difference in Reform China", *The China Journal*, No. 42, July 1999, pp. 1-18, p6

reform. Even though the residency permit system helps to hold back any mass rural migration to the cities, China is still 'in the midst of the largest mass migration the world has ever seen' which 'already dwarfs the migrations that reshaped America and the modern Western world.'[51]

1.1.4. Shenzhen Dream

> 'My cousin brought me to the long-distance coach station. I was joining many rural youth leaving the land to find jobs in the city. It was the first time in my life that I was far away from home, my familiar place, food and people . . . Getting off the coach, my first impression of the industrial town was that Shenzhen was nothing like what I had seen on TV.' [52]

The first time I went to Shenzhen in 2016 was also the first time I went to Foxconn Longhua plant. I touched-down in Shenzhen on one warm Autumn evening, with Tian Yu's story lingering in my mind. As I walked into the lift, the young girl stood next to me dressed in fake pink fur and the red-soled stilettos composed herself very proficiently and quickly snapped a few selfies, with her face well-lit by an embedded front camera flash on her smart phone. As I got to the pick-up point, the car-on-demand service app sent me a Tesla within which there was a 15'' touch screen helping us to navigate our way, and this is when I released that I had arrived in Shenzhen. There was nothing chaotic, everything was seamless, no friction. The Shenzhen I saw that evening is probably like what Tian Yu had seen on TV, the burnished metal and polished glass; architectures and cranes; palm trees and harbours; art districts and shopping malls.

Shenzhen was the first Special Economic Zone established in 1980 which opened to overseas Chinese and foreign investments under the reform and opening policy with an export-oriented economy. With those transnational corporations and private capital coming into industrial zones to set up in Shenzhen and other coastal as well as some inland cities and towns, China has experienced the world's most rapid increase in imports and

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[51] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p127
[52] Tian Yu's testimony in Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p87

exports since the 1970s. Taiwanese or Hong Kong invested enterprises and mainland domestic manufacturers became contractors and sub-contractors to Western multinationals, providing low-paid labour to reduce the costs for the multinationals, transforming China from a place that makes cheap products to a cheap place to make products with workers being extremely exploited.

Shenzhen and its surrounding Pearl River Delta region in China's southernmost Guangdong Province is now the core of the "workshop of the world". After Hong Kong was ceded to the British Empire in 1842, the biggest asset that came with Hong Kong was its location in the Pearl River estuary, where the freshwater Pearl River flows into the South China Sea. The Pearl River Delta was one of Asia's main trading ports for hundreds of years before the colonisation of Hong Kong. By 2010, the Pearl River Delta was home to about 45 million residents and had a reported GDP of $300 billion USD, which was approximately 10% of China's national GDP.[53]

Shenzhen has come to represent China's rapid modernisation and urbanisation, in both international and national popular imaginaries. Whether perceiving Shenzhen as the first Chinese city that was built based on modern planning, or focusing on its successful economic development, or dismissing it as a capitalist sweatshop, all of these seem to insist that Shenzhen is a city with "no history" that came from "nothing". It was just a "sleepy fishing village" and "rice fields" consisting of "ground zero" development and then transformed "overnight" into an "instant city" with "no intermediary" stages.[54] Shenzhen seems to be a city with standard modern qualities that transformed from the "land of fish and rice" into its gleaming present form all within two decades. But the fact is that Shenzhen did take time to transform from open trade, warring concessions, collapse of the Qing Dynasty to the People's Republic of China and later the reform and opening policy: it was not so "instant". However, for the last two decades, since the hand-over of Hong Kong in 1997, the transformation has been tremendous.

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[53] Juan Du, "Shenzhen: Urban Myth of a New Chinese City", *Journal of Architectural Education*, Vol.63, No.2, Changing Asia, March 2010, pp. 65-66, p65
[54] Ibid. p65

Hong Kong was seized by the British after the Qing Dynasty lost the first Opium war (1839-1842). Opium was disseminated in China by the British as a way to enter the Chinese market and for them to freely use the ports in China for trade. The British demanded Chinese tea, porcelain and silk, whereas there was very little demand in China for the British goods, and this was causing trade imbalance from the British point of view. The British were unwilling to trade in silver with 20% tax on top of it all. Therefore, smuggling opium even after the Chinese opium ban through the East India Company created a steady demand among the Chinese addicts for opium, which helped solve the problem of trade imbalance. The capitalists literally colonised people's dreams through the use of opium. After Lin Zexu[55] confiscated about 20,000 chests of opium and ordered a blockade of foreign trade in Canton, with all rights to China's control of drug import, the British dispatched a military force to China and called for a war. Henceforth, the British obtained five ports for trading and Hong Kong Island by forcing the Qing Dynasty to sign the unequal Treaty of Nanking on 29 August 1942, which subsequently led to the Chinese coolie trade with slavery ships departing from these treaty ports.

> '[Capital] has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.'[56]

Mark Fisher quoted this passage from Marx and Engels in his book *Capitalist Realism*. The confiscated opium by Lin was mixed with lime and salt and was thrown into the sea. The drowning of the opium did not end the opium trade, instead it brutally widened the (free) trade, which eventually led to what we see today: Shenzhen seemingly with "no history"

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[55] Lin Zexu was a leading Chinese scholar and official of the Qing dynasty, known for his role in the events leading up to the first Opium War. He was a proponent of the revitalisation of traditional Chinese thought and institutions, a movement that became known as the Self-Strengthening Movement. In a letter to Queen Victoria, written after he had first reached Guangzhou, Lin asked whether she would allow the importation of a substance as poisonous as opium into her own country and asked her to forbid her subjects to bring it into his.

[56] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2010), p4

and coming from "nothing". Fisher wrote, 'The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history: one effect of its "system of equivalence" which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or Das Kapital, a monetary value.'[57]

Capitalist realism is not a particular type of realism, not to be confined to art or to the quasi-propagandistic way in which advertising functions.[58] It is more like realism in itself. It is a realism through which 'poverty, famine and war can be presented as an inevitable part of reality, while the hope that these forms of suffering could be eliminated easily painted as naive utopianism.'[59] The history of Shenzhen is undoubtedly subsumed by capitalist realism. Worse still, the gleaming aesthetics of the city that is broadcast by television and the internet attract many young migrants to dream of the city life. Tian Yu's Shenzhen dream was what Fisher called precorporation, that is 'the pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes by capitalist culture'.[60] And the dreaming life has always already been colonised by the capitalistic system of economic power.

The next morning, I took a taxi to Foxconn's Longhua plant. While I was in the taxi, the driver reminded me to use the taxi app to book a car back as where I was heading was very far from the city centre because it would be difficult for me to get a taxi on the side of the road. I told him that I did not have any mobile internet data on my mobile phone, and he was shocked and said, 'How do you survive without internet data? Everyone has it, you have got to have it. Where you are going is very far away. You being alone, by yourself, have to be careful in these rural areas and not to get trafficked!' The driver kindly searched for a few taxi company numbers for me to call if I needed to get a taxi back, and indeed I did call the numbers in the end and I was fine.

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[57] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism,* p4
[58] Ibid. p16
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid. p9

1.1.5. Shenzhen Realism I

> 'At the Foxconn Recruitment Center, I queued up for the whole morning, filled out the job application form, pressed my fingertips onto the electronic reader, scanned my identity card, and took the blood test to complete the health check procedures. On 8 February 2010, I was employed as a general assembly-line worker. Foxconn assigned me staff number F9347140. That same afternoon I received a brief company introduction about the working hours and rules and regulations at Foxconn's Guanlan factory. I also obtained a pocket-sized, color-printed Foxconn Employee Handbook. Then, I and the hundreds of other new workers were taken to the Longhua factory, about an hour ride by the company bus. In a late afternoon, the setting sun bathed the Foxconn facilities in golden light. At 5 p.m. thousands and thousands of Foxconn workers poured out of the factory gate.'[61]

The taxi dropped me off at the North Gate of the Longhua plant. Before I went into the plant, I followed the sign to the recruitment centre, it was noon time, and it was closed for lunch. The LED strip sign above the doors was showing the information on recruitment, which runs from Monday to Saturday weekly and on Sundays it accepts application forms only. On the top right of the LED strip, there is an LED TV screen, enormous in its size compared to the size of the centre, promoting Foxconn and their world-class IDM (integrated device manufacturing) innovation. There were people waiting outside of the centre: some had their bags with them, some were standing around, some were sitting on the short pillars looking at their mobile phones.

I then went back to the North Gate and entered the factory plant. Upon entering the "Foxconn City", it felt harmonious compared to the motorways outside of the gate. There were traffic lights, coffee shops and even water fountains. There were suited Taiwanese business men chatting on the side walk and talking on their mobile phones; a man riding a one-wheel electronic scooter. A few blocks in, it became somewhat more of a high street-like area, with shops, supermarkets, mobile phone shops, and there were lots of

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[61] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p87

eateries, small restaurants and canteens. As it was noon time and probably during lunch hour as there were a lot of workers on the street, sitting on the benches really close to each other but without talking to each other, everyone was looking at their own mobile phones.

> 'My assembly-line position was at the iDPBG. I arrived late for my first day of work. The factory was too big, and I got lost. So I spent a long time looking for the iDPBG workshop. The factory directory shows that there are ten zones listed from A to H, J, and L, and they are further subdivided into A1, A2, A3, L6, L7, J20, and so on. It takes almost an hour to walk from the south main gate to the north main gate, and another hour to walk from the west to the east gate. I did not know what each building was, nor did I know the meaning of the English acronyms that could be seen written everywhere, such as FIH [Foxconn International Holdings] and the JIT [just-in-time] Hub.'[62]

As I went in further, it seemed that I had reached the building blocks of the factory workshops. On the directory board, it showed that there were different zones listed from alphabetically from A to K, and they were further divided into numerical zones such as A1, A2, A3, so on and so forth. It took me about four hours to wander around in the factory, from North Gate to South Gate and back to North Gate. As I did not have internet on my phone, I did not want to risk exiting the factory from a different gate and not being able to recognise the way back to the city centre. Midway between the gates, I went off the campus from some side steps to a more generally outskirts-looking town. But a few steps into the area, there were rows and rows of densely packed residential building blocks, with an arm reaching between each of the buildings and shops occupying the ground floor. I have never seen any density of this kind before in any other residential area I have been to.

I now come to understand that these densely packed residential blocks are called Cheng Zhong Cun, "Villages in the City". There are 300 or so villages like this in Shenzhen that are

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[62] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p88

home to nearly half of Shenzhen's population, all packed into a total area of less than 10% of the city's land, with some just off the city's spine, the *Shennan Grand Boulevard*. These villages offer a completely different urban condition to the typical perception of Shenzhen that arose according to the original 1986 Master Plan of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, which planned for a population of one million by the year 2000. The 1989 Comprehensive General Planning Modification of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone tried to keep up with faster-than-predicted growth of population by changing the planning to accommodate for 1.5 million residents. Yet the population of Shenzhen stood at ten million in 2000.[63] The discrepancies between the plan and urban form with the actual conditions of the city are accommodated by the urban realities of densely developed Villages.

Merged from nearly 2,000 former agrarian villages that occupied the city's land prior to the transformation of Shenzhen, stand the 300 villages scattered throughout Shenzhen's commercial developments and industrial zones. In 1989, the central government purchased the land rights from the village collectives by designating the land as urban land in order to build the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone. In exchange, each male villager received a 120 square meter parcel of land to construct a new house for themselves. Over the years, most villagers constructed low-quality and low-rent housing on these square parcels of land and rented them to the influx of migrant workers who came to Shenzhen in search of work. Most of the former peasants became landlords and developers by collecting a steady income from the rents. The planning for Shenzhen did not predict and could not construct enough housing for the continuous influx of migrants. In recent years, most of the former village heads have become CEOs of village-collective-owned corporations that develop commercial properties open to the public and negotiate enormous transactions by selling the village-collective land to private investors and developers. The position of Shenzhen's former peasantry evolved with the reform and development, participating in the support of the capitalistic production.

As I was stepping into this village from the factory side, lots of people were coming back to the factory, it seemed like a rush hour with everyone routinely touching in with their

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[63] Du, "Shenzhen", p65

work ID cards. There was a security guard there but everyone was touching the ID cards in and out in a very orderly manner. I was afraid that the guard would stop me for not touching in my card, but he did not say anything. In and out seemed so easy for me I guess because I never opted in.

> 'I woke up at 6:30 a.m., attended an unpaid morning meeting at 7:20 a.m., started work at 7:40 a.m., went to lunch at 11, and then usually skipped the evening meal to work overtime until 7:40 p.m.
>
> I attended compulsory unpaid work meetings every day. I reported to the line leaders 15 to 20 minutes earlier for roll call. Leaders lecture us on maintaining high productivity, reaching daily output targets and keeping discipline.
>
> There seemed to be no way for me to say 'no' to overtime … Toilet breaks during the working hours are also restricted. I had to swipe my staff ID card at electronic readers at the beginning and end of my work shift. I had to ask permission from the assistant line leaders to leave my seat.'[64]

Foxconn is pressured by the buyer-driven supply chain, container trucks and forklifts could be seen on the campus ready to churn out the iProducts. In 2010, Apple "awarded" iPhone orders to Foxconn after Foxconn agreed to sell parts at "zero profit".[65] Apple's products are sent around the world by air to save the time value of money. Despite the fact that every movement of the workers is being surveyed and tracked by ID cards and CCTV, consumers can track their purchased devices on websites such as flightaware.com to monitor the shippers' active flights.[66]

> 'The first day they took me to the assembly line. We had a look and would be on the shop floor the next day. The Full Technician [quanjianyuan] gave a brief explanation about the job, and you were put on the assembly line.

[64] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p88

[65] Mahesh Sharma, "Apple made zero-profit deal with Foxconn, say activists", 10/06/2010 https://www.zdnet.com/article/apple-made-zero-profit-deal-with-foxconn-say-activists/ [Accessed 20 April 2020]

[66] Joe White, "Once Again, You Can Track Your New iPhone's transit using FlightAware", 22/09/2015 https://appadvice.com/appnn/2015/09/once-again-you-can-track-your-new-iphones-transit-using-flightaware [Accessed 25 August 2018]

As I was a newbie, he said, "If you have questions, ask others nearby." But others were all busy working, how did they have time [to talk] to you?'[67]

To make sure targets are met for such demand, Foxconn's production model adopts a classic Taylorism, where the production process is simplified to an extreme degree that workers do not need any specialised knowledge or training to perform the tasks. Workers' performances are tested by stop watches and computerised engineering devices by the industrial engineering department. If they are able to meet the quota, targets will be increased to the maximum possible. Workers face serious problems if they are unable to complete orders within the set times, and their 10-minute break will be denied if they fail to meet the hourly production target.

'In the beginning I worked slowly. For each backlogged pile [of screens], I shouldn't be the only one held accountable because there were two outside checkers. But every time they accused me for working slowly, and I couldn't do anything.

When we started working each shift, the line leader would give an admonitory speech. He would say he did not only reprimand me, he would do that to us all. All of us on that assembly line stood there, listening to his rebuke.' [68]

The Foxconn management model is extremely militarised and insists on absolute obedience from top to bottom in a chain of command. The 13 tiers of Foxconn management hierarchy are organised in a pyramid with clear lines of command. 'Senior leaders formulate the corporate development strategy and set annual profit goals. Middle management devise implementation plans and delegate responsibility while, in the workshop, production operators face intense supervision from multiple layers of management, including assistant line leaders, line leaders, team leaders and supervisors.'[69] And at the bottom of this pyramid are the workers, that are referred to as

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[67] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave,* p83
[68] Ibid.
[69] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p89

buquanxu workers. The term *buquanxu* originates from the Taiwanese army: it is the lowest rank.[70]

After coming back to the factory plant, I walked pass the Foxconn IE (Industrial Engineering) University. Industrial engineering deals with optimisation of complex organisations; it eliminates waste of time, money, materials, machine time, labour and other resources that do not generate value. To set up such a university within the factory campus shows the importance of IE to Foxconn who do the most to optimize the working hours of the workers and their efficiency. Althusser described abstract labour-power in this way: 'the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class 'in words'.'[71] The Foxconn assembly workers are minimally trained in terms of skills before they start the job, and on the shop floor a collection of quotations could be found on the factory walls:

> 'Value efficiency every minute, every second.
>
> Achieve goals or the sun will no longer rise.
>
> The devil is in the details.'[72]

The management's practice and corporate culture are perceived by scholars as punishment-oriented: workers are often being blamed and singled out to stand in the corner if mistakes occurred. On some occasions, the whole production line of more than 100 people are made to stay behind when one worker is being punished. The worker has to read out a statement of self-criticism in front of the production team. The worker's mistake is projected onto everyone as the line leader shouts: 'If one worker loses only one minute, then, how much more time will be wasted by 100 people?' [73]

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[70] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave,* p81
[71] Louis Althusser, trans. Ben Brewster, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, pp. 85-126
[72] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p88
[73] Ibid. p90

'Realism means that the world is dull and full of routine, but that the soul is sick and screaming.' G.K. Chesterton wrote this in *The Dragon's Grandmother* to a man who did not believe in fairy tales.[74] Shenzhen realism imposed on the factory life is dull and full of routine, but for some with an entrepreneurial spirit who moved to Shenzhen, opportunities seem to be everywhere. With the rising of smart technologies, innovation and development make the city seems ever so futuristic. Capitalist realism is 'a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education, and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action.'[75] Capitalist Realism evaluates everything in terms of money, and turns from belief to aesthetic, from engagement to spectatorship. As Fisher remarked, any hope, is a dangerous illusion.[76]

Fisher noted following Fredric Jameson's claim about postmodernism that it is the "cultural logic of late capitalism". Fisher's capitalist realism can be subsumed under the rubric of postmodernism as theorised by Jameson, but he found that 'postmodernism remains a hugely contested term, its meanings, appropriately but unhelpfully, unsettled and multiple', as well as 'some of the processes which Jameson described and analysed have now become so aggravated and chronic that they have gone through a change in kind'[77], hence Fisher's preference for using the coinage of capitalist realism.

Apart from the fact that "there is no alternative" to capitalism, and that it has colonised the dreaming life of the population, one other reason that Fisher used the term capitalist realism, is that postmodernism involved some relationship to modernism. Jameson saw the incorporation of modernist motifs into popular culture and particular modernist forms were absorbed and commodified. Instead, capitalist realism no longer stages this kind of confrontation with modernism, as modernism is taken as something that can periodically return but only as a frozen aesthetic style, never as an ideal for living[78].

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[74] G.K. Chesterton, *Tremendous Trifles* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), p98
[75] Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p20
[76] Ibid. p9
[77] Ibid. p7
[78] Ibid. p12

The Chinese Postmodernism as characterised by Zhang Xudong, a student of Jameson, confirms that postmodernism inherits all the internal and historical ambiguities of modernism and in the case of Chinese postmodernism, the inherent paradox 'lies in the fact that, by declaring the end of an era, it creates a sense of liberation from the past, hence of a limitless, indefinite future; yet, by placing itself after something it intends to transcend, postmodernism—its novelty, innovativeness, and aesthetic appeal—can only be experienced and measured against the established, dominant norms and institutions.'[79] Zhang further notes,

> 'postmodernism, like modernism, is an endless and sometimes self-defeating struggle to become and remain the ever new. Like modernism, it lends its form to even its most determined opponents: there are postmodern anti-postmodernists, in the same way that there have been modernists of anti-modernism and revolutionaries of counter-revolution. Like modernism, postmodernism entails and is entailed by different socio-economic and political orientations and positions. Like modernism, postmodernism encompasses radically different social ideals and political ideologies. Unlike modernism, however, postmodernism does not see everything as cosmologically, heroically new; rather, its concept of newness or creation is hinged on a sophisticated, almost cynical, sense that all the good and evil, in their most extreme forms, have been tried, somewhere, somehow, and sometime before, and what is left for contemporary men and women is nothing more than shrewd and occasionally breathtaking eclecticism, synthesis, reproduction, and representation in the most literal sense. In this respect, there is nothing more indicative of the aesthetics of the postmodern than fashion or its concept of what is fashionable, which is fundamentally cyclical. This sense of relaxation, if not freedom, from the pressure of linear temporality (progress) and singular spatiality (Europe) can create new breaks, ruptures

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[79] Zhang, "Postmodernism and Post-Socialist Society Cultural Politics in China After the New Era", p82

and fluctuations as it shakes the very foundations of our notions of history, selfhood, meaning, and just about everything else.'[80]

The category of class is not so alien in reformed China, perhaps even worse, it is reified, to be discerned by the Marxist notion of "class" when it comes to the Shenzhen former peasantry who turned into property developers. However, in contrast, Mao's era placed great emphasis on agency of the people and was antithetical to the orthodox Marxist analysis of class. The notion of class was alien to the Chinese peasantry who formed the base of the Chinese Communist revolution, and yet the Communist Party persistently proclaimed itself the vanguard of the Chinese proletariat. As Pun Ngai notes, 'The arbitrary relationships between political symbolism and class subjects were too conspicuous, making the Chinese Communist revolution look like a postmodern project long before postmodernism came into play in the field of social analysis.'[81] This shows us that, when working with postmodernism in the context of China, we have to think "Chinese postmodernism" and not postmodernism in China.

In the afternoon, there were fewer people on the streets. I noticed that the buildings with large windows, balconies or exposed corridors had all been "fenced up" by wire mesh nets that were being referred to as the "suicide nets", installed to prevent people from leaping. The "suicide nets" were the one thing I was expecting to see, before I made the trip to the factory. I observed the factory as if I was looking for this one piece of evidence, the evidence of the concealed, the negated, the denied suicide incidences. The wire mesh nets I saw then were different to the "suicide nets" that I had seen in the pictures. The "suicide nets" that were first put up to manage the crisis were installed from two storeys from the ground up the building, and they stuck out from the side of the building. The nets were there to catch, if any one ever fell. This was to prevent people from leaping, because the body would inevitably be caught. However, the wire mesh nets I saw were more discreet looking, almost hard to notice. But the colourful clothes hangers that were hanging on the nets by the workers to dry their washing made the nets evident, in a sense

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[80] Zhang, "Postmodernism and Post-Socialist Society Cultural Politics in China After the New Era", p82-83
[81] Pun, *Made In China*, p16

that life was just hanging there. The nets no longer stick out of the building to signify the crisis. The crisis has been internalised and the prevention has become a permanent measure. In fact, new employees are now being asked to sign a "no-suicide consent letter" before they start working officially.

Jack Linchuan Qiu compares the Foxconn "suicide nets" to the nets installed on the slave ships during the Middle Passage. Qiu says, the African slaves chose the jump overboard to 'free themselves from the unbearable miseries onboard, to refuse being treated like animals, to return to their home villages, as many of them believed'. [82] Netting, fencelike assemblage of ropes were stretched by the crew around the ship to prevent slaves from jumping overboard, and the reason for this was profit. The crew had to minimize death rates among slaves in order to maximize the sales of slaves. Qiu further compares the condition of Foxconn's dormitory with the condition of the slave ships to align his argument of iProduct assembly workers as contemporary slaves. Qiu's approach to this comparison is entirely illustrative, where he is not able to take into consideration that the struggle of the African slaves is not something could be set out to mobilise another claim; it is a different project of emancipation. There is no way any comparison could be made here between how a decision is made for one to enter a factory and become an assembly line worker, and how one is snatched from one's homeland and sold off as a commodity. The only association between the two kinds of suicide nets is that the nets cut off all the possibilities.

1.2. Lines of Movement II
1.2.1. Post-socialist Labour Identity
David Harvey remarks on S.K. Lee's suggestion from Lee's 2004 panel statement of *Made in China: Labor as a Political Force?*, that both Chinese state and migrant workers,

> 'reject the term working class and refuse 'class as the discursive frame to constitute their collective experience'. Nor do they see themselves as 'the contractual, juridical, and abstract labour subject normally assumed in

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[82] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave*, p75

theories of capitalistic modernity', bearing individual legal rights. They typically appeal instead to the traditional Maoist notion of the masses constituted by 'workers, the peasantry, the intelligentsia and the national bourgeoisie whose interests were harmonious with each other and also with the state'.'[83]

This rejection of the attachment to any class configuration other than being described as the masses is in a way a rejection of returning to the old days of "class struggle". The reform and opening policy has taken a path that seems to fit with the aim of preventing the formation of any coherent capitalist class power bloc within China where direct foreign investment has kept the power of capitalist class ownership offshore.[84] This foreign portfolio investment limits the powers of international finance capital over the Chinese state and the keeping of state ownership structures while liberating managerial autonomy. In short, this prevents any attempt at capitalist class formation. As Marx remarked, capitalism exports its mode of exploitation but not modes of production nor modes of social production.[85] The capitalist class power might be kept offshore, but the capitalistic mode of exploitation casts its net over the Chinese migrant labour forces.

The economic reform has inevitably led to social inequality and to something that looks uncomfortably like the reconstitution of capitalist class power[86]. The change from an agricultural and state socialist mode of production to an industrial and capitalist mode of production has clearly taken part in the increasingly complex division of global labour. This research thus feels the urge to update the new worker-subject that is made up of rural migrant workers especially, before delving into the new global working class. It will try to describe the worker-subjects with a terminological rigor in order to fully comprehend how things have evolved.

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[83] Much of this section draws on Harvey's Neoliberalism with Chinese Characteristics in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, pp.120-151, p149-150

[84] Ibid. p123

[85] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Talk, Interview with the Editors (29 October 1993)" in *The Spivak Reader,* eds. Donna Landry, and Gerald MacLean (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 1996)*, p292

[86] Harvey*, A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p122

Scholars have been working on the subject of Chinese female migrant workers including Pun Ngai who has also been writing quite extensively on Foxconn in the recent years. Pun's work on migrant women's roles in the factory are mostly conducted from field work in the late 1990s. In her 2005 book *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*, Pun looks closely at the role of *dagongmei*, a term used to describe young women who migrated from rural regions to work in the factories. Pun notes that *dagongmei* does not correspond to the Chinese state's concept of the working class which was defined in the Mao period as comprising workers in the state-owned heavy industry, since the division of labour has become more explicit when compared to the socialist era.

Dagong means "working for the boss" or "selling labour" in the sense of a capitalist exchange of labour for wages that is also "disposable". *Mei* means younger sister, which implies gender as well as marital status – *Mei* as single, unmarried and younger. In contrast to *gongren* which means "worker" that carries the highest status in the Mao's socialist period, *dagongmei* signifies the lesser of an identity as a term to encompass what Pun calls the "postsocialist appropriation of labour by capital"[87]. Pun notes that rural migrants are not considered to be qualified workers at the beginning, but "workers-to-be", and the young women are often easily recognised as being from the rural regions due to their appearance and their inappropriate behaviour in the industrial space. Therefore, both the factory production regime and the young women themselves share in the common desire to transform the girls into *dagongmei*, modern "working girls"[88].

Apart from their regional or ethnic identity being judged by their different dialects and accents, *dagongmei* are also discriminated against by the line manager because of their "rural-ness". They are often reminded that they are peasants and not workers, but they should be workers. By juxtaposing farming and industrial work, the line managers were able to reinforce a hierarchy of values in which factory work occupied a higher position, which in turn allowed these supervisory roles to produce malleable subjects. *Dagongmei*

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[87] Pun, *Made In China*, p12
[88] Pun, "Becoming Dagongmei", p3

is often   frustrated for not living up to the demands of a modern world and for not being modern themselves.[89]

> 'To avoid being discriminated against or depreciated, one had to try hard to change oneself. Self-technologizing, as Foucault said, is the core of power. To make war with one's past identity was for the sake of founding a new identity, to cut the umbilical cord of one's past life. Industrial work was desired not only because of the higher wages, but for the new identity and the new sense of life that it created.'[90]

As *dagongmei* stands in contrasts to *gongren* (worker), a non-sexualised term, Pun notes feminisation of labour has proceeded rapidly in Shenzhen and other economic development zones. *Dagongzai*, the blue collar male workers, were also employed in these economic zones but they were given different positions, which revealed the sexual division of labour in the work place[91].

> 'In South China, sexualizing labour in this manner is a project of capital, rather than the state. This can be seen if we compare the *gongren* of Mao's period and the *dagongmei/zai* of today. With *gongre*, sexual difference was submerged. Women were introduced into the "world of men", be it in light, heavy or military industries. The official rhetoric proclaimed that women could hold up half of the sky in socialist China and could do whatever men do. In the official regulatory practices sexual difference was diluted through propaganda and institutionalized arrangement. With the dissolution of socialist practices, the term *gongren* became an out-dated mode of everyday discourse, especially in South China. The disembodied world of industrial labour was to be gendered. The femaleness of the worker was not to be veiled, but had to be reinvented and regulated.'[92]

Dagongmei thus moved down the social strata, and their feminine identities were often pinned onto them while the line managers were tightening workers' discipline. Pun

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[89] Pun, "Becoming Dagongmei", p4
[90] Ibid. p5
[91] Ibid. p14
[92] Ibid.

noticed that the regulation of gender was often invoked when labour control was at stake, and the female workers' identity as labourer seemed to be less important than their identity as females in the eyes of management. *Dagongmei* were often reminded of their femaleness in the sense of a girl in the process of becoming a woman: one should behave in tender, submissive, obedient, industrious ways; a girl should take care of the job as one day she would take care of the family; a girl who is going to be a woman, a wife, and a mother of men. Pun points out that Mao's era highlighted 'the category of class while negating sexual differentiation', whereas Deng's era 'was marked by the proliferation of gender discourses and female bodily images'. Since the rural female work force was considered to be cheaper and easier to regulate, it allowed capitalist production in Shenzhen to develop a new system of work-place hierarchy[93].

Dagongmei thus exists paradoxically in its formation as a subject: it is forming in the sense of becoming a worker, but at the same time, such workers are being reminded of their upcoming womanhood, of becoming and behaving like women after they leave the factory to be wives. Becoming women outside the factory and becoming workers within the factory are double-binded in the term *dagongmei*, which makes *dagongmei* a short-lived precarious identity that sits between tradition and the modern context. Tactics used by the line manager to dislocate their identity and their femaleness produces even more confusion and precarity for the teen girls. *Dagongmei* is less of an identity: it is not able to be configured as a class category, but as a gendered sub-class, never becoming this or that, but always a migrant working girl.

Pun produced this body of work on *dagongmei* based on her experience of working as an assembly line worker in a Hong Kong-owned electronics factory in Shenzhen in the 1990s. On the other hand, Tian Yu shares a similar trajectory with the last generation of *dagongmei,* that is, of being a girl who moved from the rural regions to work in a factory in Shenzhen, but two decades later. The social identity of *dagongmei* of the 1990s only partially apply to Tian Yu. The consumerists' demands have escalated; the types of products being produced have changed; process of the production has changed; the

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[93] Pun, "Becoming Dagongmei", p18

workers are better educated than the previous generation, and consumerism training within the population and the workers has increased. Yet class formation has been a complicated affair. This being said, the restructuring of the global economy and its representation by free market ideologies have led us to a point where our ability to understand or even perceive class has been diminishing. We should always remember that class must be learned to unlearn. Thus, a new social identity needs to be worked out here.

1.2.2. Workers of the Cybernetics

This section focuses on Tian Yu conceptually in relation to the contemporary conditions produced by capitalism, which itself has transformed tremendously through the advances of technological development. This section also focuses on two coinages that encapsulate the conditions that Tian Yu lives through. "Cyber-proletariat", as coined by Nick Dyer-Witheford, further clarifies the relation of cybernetics and class since the great crash of 2008, and offers an analysis of cybernetic capital. Cyber-proletariat takes its name from what Ursula Huws calls the early information worker "cybertariat". And Huws pays attention to how the new social categories are created by emphasising gender and race when it comes to determining class identity. Through these coinages, this section engages with worker subjects and their relationship with the discussion of class.

The word "cybernetics" seems to be a relatively old term to describe the field of technology now, as it was coined in the 1940s and carries the connotations of the commanding, controlling and communicating functions of machines. "Cyber-", which is the prefix of cybernetics, comes from Greek *kybernetes* meaning "steersman", from kybernan, "to steer or pilot a ship". It then evolved into "governor, government" via Latin, signifying governance and rulership.[94] Norbert Wiener theorised cybernetics as a systems theory of control and communication, which would regulate itself, give feedback and fix on a defined goal. This seeing of the directions, of understanding where subjectivities

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[94] "Cybernetics (n.)", *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/word/cybernetics, [Accessed 15 July 2018]

come from and merge into, is also how I anticipate this research to manifest itself: tracing the trajectory of the terminologies and seeing their directions, in order to understand the process that draws the lines of movement. The designation of cybernetics with its historical development of computing technology has given its name to all the cybernetic technologies raging from giant mainframe computers, desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones and so on. Hence the adoption of cybernetics in this research, which brings together all the resulting economic and social changes.

Personal computers might have attempted to dissolve class by placing the 'means of production' in the hands of the working class. But these discussions leave behind the super-exploited industrialised workers like Tian Yu, who had to inspect the iPad screen and put a sticker on it all within 15 seconds with limited movement, as well as what Franco "Bifo" Beradi calls the "cognitarian" who are the info-workers of virtual production.

Through the notion of cybertariat, Huws examines the process that renders the situation of the worker more precarious with the rise of digital technologies, the changing categories of employment and modes of organisation; she does this especially by questioning 'how digital value chains have intensified capital's dependence on the female and globalized labour force performing routine and neo-Taylorized clerical, data entry and office work'.[95] While Huws works on finding a term to locate the office workers who process information but who do not produce surplus value directly, because the increase of this labour is always a result, never a cause of more surplus value. Huws notices the tension that underlies the discussion of class, that is between class as an analytical term (objective class position) and class as an aspect of personal identity (subjective class position).[96]

The term *dagongmei* contains this tension within it, where *dagong* – working for the boss - takes an objective class position, but *mei* – the younger sister - indicates one's personal identity though not strictly a subject class position. But *dagong* does not include the

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[95] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat*, p13
[96] Ursula Huws, "The Making of a Cybertariat? Virtual Work In A Real World", *Socialist Register*, Vol. 37, 2001, p3

categories defined by the technical relations of production if we were to search for a term to strictly describe migrant female workers at the electronics factory. What it does address is the social relation of production (working for, non-ownership of the means of production) and the social division of labour as well as culturally constructed hierarchies.

Kevin Robins and Frank Webster also point out Huws's remark on the impact of information technologies developments on work and leisure and their interrelation, which are felt most acutely by women workers. Whether they work in the factory, the office or the home, the quality of the women's daily lives is likely to deteriorate as is the case with the de-skilling of much work under various forms of automation, with accelerating office automation and the Taylorisation of much intellectual labour.[97]

As some of the existing analysis does not go beyond the west, Huws notices that an analysis which examines the position of these office workers, both in their own local labour markets and in relation to their comparators in other countries, is missing. Since parts of a single labour process can now be moved around the world, the implication is not only for individual workplaces but for the working class as a whole. One example is computer operators in India who process medical transcriptions for doctors in the US and earn one-eighth of what the US computer operator would earn, and four times the salary of an Indian school teacher.

In her later work, Huws tries to pin down class in the global digital age. 'Leaving aside the rural populations that still subsist, at least in part, from their own direct labor on the land' Huws writes, 'the largest group is this emerging labor landscape, and by far the most rapidly-growing, is that of workers "inside the knots".'[98] These workers "inside the knots" of capitalism include groups that are less directly involved in capitalist social relations, including those who are employed by capitalist enterprises producing commodities, both material and immaterial. As Huws notes, many of these workers have been sucked directly

[97] Kevin Robins, Frank Webster, "Cybernetic Capitalism: Information, Technology, Everyday Life" eds. in Vincent Mosko and Janet Wasko, The Political Economy of Information, pp. 45-74

[98] Ursula Huws, *Labor in the Global Digital Economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014), p178

into capitalist labour relations relatively recently. In the case of China from the 1980s, these "inside the capitalist knots" workers include those coming to this work as migrants from the country side or from other countries (notably workers come from Vietnam to work in Guangdong in recent years), being transferred from public sector employment (during the economic reform), or recruited from a previous existence in petty commodity production. Most of them do not have the status of permanent employees, with many paid by piecework or day rates or employed on a casual or temporary basis. 'They are, nevertheless, productive workers, directly producing surplus value. However, the ways in which their labour processes connect with each other are not obvious.' [99]

Huws furthers this by giving an example of what labour contains in a product such as a smartphone: it contains the results of the labour of miners, assembly-line workers, chemical workers, designers, engineers, call-center workers, invoice clerks, cleaners, and many more. These workers, scattered over different countries, with different occupational and social identities, may not perceive themselves as having anything in common at all. They may believe their (social) interests to be directly opposed to each other. Huws speculates that if these workers were to organise themselves, it might be undertaken on the basis of skill, occupation, of the company they work for, but it might also be based on the basis of a shared regional, linguistic, or cultural identity, a shared political history or a response to a shared form of discrimination. Huws questions what forms of solidarity or shared consciousness might emerge from these forms of organisation. [100]

The cyber-proletariat is concerned with a similar demographic of workers, who are involved within the cybernetic capital, but not necessarily including the female invoice clerks and cleaners. Dyer-Witheford's previous works are inspired by, but also critical of, Hardt and Negri's *Empire,* which suggests 'a fully global capital now confronted not so much a working class as a "multitude" immersed in "immaterial labour" involving the communicational and affective dimensions of networked production' as well as declaring

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[99] Huws, *Labor in the Global Digital Economy,* p178
[100] Ibid. p179

the possibility of digital subversion and supersession of the capital's cybernetic domination.[101] Later, a "post-operaist" analysis of "cognitive capitalism" was developed by theorists such as Paulo Virno, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Tiziana Terranova, whereby 'control of knowledge is understood as the main site for contesting capitalism and networks present an opportunity for multitude'[102]. However, the problem posed by post-operaist analysis is that '"immaterial labour" seemed to deny the persistence of hard, corporeal, and all too material toil', and these problems were later 'intensified by the 2008 financial meltdown with the transition from alter-globalism's "another wold is possible" to the "no future" aftermath of the crash'. Thus, the youthful "immaterial labour" found itself out of a job and without prospects while networked commons were overtaken by the immiseration of austerity.[103]

Therefore, cyber-proletariat is engaged with a "post-post-operaist" analysis of cybernetic capital that is concerned with the relationship between contemporary global workers, from the Turkish miners who mine materials for cybernetic devices that killed in a shaft collapse, to iProduct assembly workers like Tian Yu; to the disassembly workers of e-waste, to the e-dump collector in Africa, to the call centre operators in India, and to the highly paid "hackers" in Silicon Valley. This reveals the continuing existence of material toil and deep divisions within the planetary multitude. 'Proletariat encompasses not only the assembly-line electronics worker or the call centre operative but also the former peasant populations plucked off the land without necessarily being able to find employment, or labour ejected from production by cybernetic automation and communication.'[104]

The Roman *proletarii* refers to the citizens who are landless, whose offspring (proles) were listed instead of their property. For Marx, the proletariat is a social class that does not own the means of production and sells their labour for wages; to be proletarian is to be deprived of control over one's work process and what is produced[105]. To understand the

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[101] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat*, p10
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party", p14
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf [Accessed 25 August 2018]

proletarian economically is to understand that there is nothing other than a wage-labourer who produces surplus value for capital and is thrown out on the street as soon as they become superfluous to the need of the labour surplus. The cyber-proletariat here produces the communicative devices but has no control over their own work process and what is produced because they only assemble a part of the devices. In fact, when the researcher asked Tian Yu about her role on the assembly line, she replied with simply two words, "external inspection". And the researcher asked whether she was inspecting a computer or a mobile phone, Tian Yu said she did not know.[106]

As "working class" and "proletariat" are still often used synonymously to refer simply to wage labour, the distinction between the two is defined by Ramin Ramtin in his 1991 book *Capitalism and Automation: Revolution in Technology and Capitalist Breakdown*, in which Ramtin defines the proletariat as 'the class that has nothing but its labour power to sell and which has no decision-making control over either its operational or allocative use of material productive forces and the labour of itself'. [107] Furthermore, the distinction between "wage labour" and the "proletariat" is that, 'although a proletarian needs to sell his/her labour power, this necessity does not mean that such a sale has actually taken place.' [108] Thus, "working class" clearly includes all wage labourers and "proletariat" includes wage labourers, as well as the unemployed and paupers. And by using proletariat rather than worker, cyber-proletariat acknowledges that a large proportion of the working class is workless.[109]

The proletariat phases in and out of work, the workless-ness and precarity are the shared condition of the rural migrant workers seeking work in the cities. Hence cyber-proletariat takes as its starting point neither "multitude" nor "worker", but "proletariat'' which re-examines the relation of cybernetics and class conditioned by the 2008 crash and the subsequent unrest in 2011. And the plan of cybernetic capital is the 'making of a planetary working class tasked with working itself out of a job, toiling relentlessly to develop a

[106] Jack Qiu, "Deconstructing Foxconn", *Vimeo*, 2010, https://vimeo.com/15630934 [Accessed 25 August 2018]
[107] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p13
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.

system of robots and networks, networked robots and robot networks, for which the human is ultimately surplus to requirements.' [110] This has heightened the new levels of volatility of the proletarian position as it sucks values from labour to capital, with the cyber-proletariat caught up in the midst of it all.

Tian Yu originated from a peasantry background. As a female migrant worker, she could be briefly called a *dagongmei* – one who works in a factory as a teen girl. But she was so over-worked that she did not have the time to explore the city, the same way the older generation of *dagongmei* would, going into town together during their free time and forging a community. Cybertariat signifying the idea of a working class defined by its direct relationship to production is outmoded, paying, as it does, particular attention to digital and virtual labour, and to the women who do this work. Tian Yu worked from a fixed, localised position, and she was working from "inside the knot" of capitalism as the cybertariat. But the material toil of the assembly workers in recent years urges an interrogation of the conditions again, hence the focus on cyber-proletariat here. Furthermore, the relation of Tian Yu's occupation, cybernetics as the technical relation of production, and proletariat as the social relation of production could be probed by adopting the term. Although Tian Yu no longer works on the assembly line since the suicide attempt, it is the worklessness and the precarity that locate her as cyber-proletariat. As Tian Yu said, 'I can no longer be a migrant worker, nor can I do farm work.'[111]

1.2.3. Techno(im)mobility

Communicative devices such as mobile phones are the "genotypic" commodity of the global market. When Tian Yu decided to move to Shenzhen, her father provided her with a second-hand mobile phone alongside cash of 500 Yuan ($80 USD). But "at the moment of crisis", when Tian Yu had spent all the money and was not being paid, her mobile phone broke and the mobile phone she borrowed from her cousin was stolen, so she could not call for help.

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[110] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p15
[111] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p92

The ready-to-hand form of a mobile phone produces a system that 'requires people in perpetual motion, in touch, up to speed, "always on"'[112], and it is constantly disintegrating space through time. A mobile phone is crucial for finding work: Dyer-Witheford has noted that rural labourers in Uganda depend on the mobile phone to find work, and fear missing work opportunities as employers would first contact those with mobile phones.[113] Therefore, the mobile phone has become a necessity for those involved in casual labour, even if airtime is more expensive than the labourer would prefer; airtime for work opportunities taking precedence over other things that are perhaps more important.

However, for Chinese migrant women, especially for those that work in the service industry, as suggested by Cara Wallis in her 2013 book *Technomobility in China: Young Migrant Women and Mobile Phones*,[114] mobile phones enable a sense of "immobile mobility" which she defines as a socio-techno means of surpassing spatial, temporal, physical and structural boundaries, that is grounded in the concrete practices and constraints of the everyday experiences of migrant women who deal with limitations on their control of time, space, and mobility. Fundamentally, 'immobile mobility captures the way that the mobile phone is frequently used from a fixed location (thus negating its mobile element), this is only part of its significance, albeit a very important part given migrants' long work hours'.[115] "Immobile mobility" does apply to Tian Yu, at Foxconn as she worked from a fixed, localised position where mobile phones or any metallic objects were not allowed to be brought into the workshop; the mobile phone was only used during the limited free time she had within the factory.

Furthermore, "immobile mobility" implies the circumstances under which mobile phones that are used by young migrant women differ from the "digital natives"[116] – the youth and

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[112] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat*, p103

[113] Ibid. p114

[114] Wallis's book is a study of young rural-to-urban migrant women's socio-techno practices address a wide range of issues salient to research on contemporary China, migration, mobile telephony, and cultural approaches to technology appropriation.

[115] Cara Wallis, *Technomobility in China: Young Migrant women and Mobile Phones* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), p6

[116] A term coined by Marc Prensky in Prensky's work on "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants", *On the Horizon*, Vol. 9 No. 5, October 2001

young adults who have always been surrounded by digital technologies such as computers and video-game consoles, dial-up and broadband Internet access, mobile phones, digital music players, tablet computers, e-readers etc. The digital natives' various engagements with new media are constitutive of what Henry Jenkins calls "convergence culture", which is a world where every story, sound, image, and relationship plays itself out across a maximum number of media channels. The same contents can be converged on different devices that one owns, hence one can listen to the same music on one's phone and laptop through the transmission of the music from one device to the other. Jenkins's arguments are grounded in a western context where he acknowledges that the description of convergence culture is based on a relatively privileged group that is 'disproportionately white, male, middle class, and college educated'.[117] However, "convergence culture" can also be seen in the contemporary Chinese context, where the youth and young adults are growing up with a plethora of digital devices, especially if the devices are native brands with more accessible price points. There is also the addiction of gaming as a new form of addiction without substance – another important contemporary condition which we will not be discussing here, but that is worth noting[118].

Wallis' work emphasises the users who are not "born digital", for whom the mobile phone is not supplementing a landline; a mobile phone with a camera is the first camera one has ever owned, and for whom the mobile internet is, if not one's first exposure to the Internet, nonetheless the primary means of access. This is in contrast to what Wallis terms "selective convergence", that is, when a person intentionally chooses to use convergent functions on one device such as checking emails with smart phones while out of office. She characterises young migrant women's technology use as "necessary convergence", as 'the converging of multiple usage on a single device out of necessity because no other device is owned or because the device in one's possession has limited functionality'.[119] This entails examples such as taking a picture of a film poster on a mobile phone because

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[117] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2008), p23

[118] In fact, on 18 June 2018, the World Health Organization officially released the draft to classify the gaming disorder – an addition to playing video games – as a real mental health condition. Video games are now being referred to as "digital heroin". More and more Chinese families are sending their children to boot camps that are designed to break video game addiction.

[119] Wallis, *Technomobility in China*, p7-8

one either does not have Internet capability on the mobile phone to search for the image or cannot afford a mobile Internet service.

The notion of "necessary convergence" highlights technological convergence while not denying the conditions under which one is compelled to converge necessarily. For more privileged users, the hardware is diverging while the content converges, thus one can have as many devices as one wants to converge the same email accounts, contents, music, apps, etc. And for marginalised groups like young migrant women, both hardware and content must converge on the same device: camera, browser, music, pictures, apps are all stored and accessible on one device. The "born digital" are increasingly utilising converging functions on one device due to being able to afford superior technology that has recently been developed, for instance the smart phone, yet for the opposite reason of economic constraints, young migrant women engage in necessary convergence by using a subpar smart phone.

1.3. Lines of Movement III

1.3.1. A Subordinated Position

The concept of subaltern was first developed by Gramsci through his *Prison Notebooks* (1929-1935), which were written during his ten years of imprisonment at the hands of Mussolini's Fascist regime from 1926. His interest in the subaltern in the *Prison Notebooks* is a part of his overarching inquiry into Italian history, politics, culture, and the relation between political and civil society that together form the integral state. Although Gramsci did not work on the concept of subaltern until when he was in prison, he had been working on the condition of subalternity in his pre-prison writings, especially in the last essay before his arrest, *Some Aspects of the Southern Question*. In this essay, Gramsci focused his analysis on the social and class structures of Southern Italy, investigating the role of the Southern intellectual in fulfilling the interests of dominant social groups, and calling for an alliance between the proletariat and the peasant masses to become revolutionary forces.

After his arrest, Gramsci elaborated his questions concerned within the *Southern Question*, and extended them to include all aspects of Italian society and history as recorded in the *Prison Notebooks*. Subaltern was first used by Gramsci under censorship where he was obliged to call the proletarian "subaltern". It was then used in a literal sense to refer to non-commissioned military troops who were subordinated to the authority of lieutenants, colonels and generals. [120] And later it was used figuratively and metaphorically in regard to positions of subordination of lower status, such as describing Engels's edit of Marx's unfinished works as, 'lacking in theoretical skills (or at least occupies a subaltern position in relation to Marx)'.[121]

In Notebook 3, Gramsci first used "subaltern" in regard to social class, 'Subaltern classes are subject to initiatives of the dominant class. Even when they rebel, they are in a state of anxious defence.'[122] Here subaltern is being defined as a social class that is subordinate to a ruling group's domination. Subsequently, Gramsci devoted Notebook 25 exclusively to the subaltern, calling it *On the Margins of History: History of Subaltern Groups*, and in which he reproduced and consolidated thirteen notes from Notebooks 1, 3 and 9. In this Notebook, Gramsci identified slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races and the proletariat as subaltern social groups, who were oppressed and discriminated against by the National Fascist Party: he recognised the importance of studying the specific characteristics of subalternity within the political and social order.

The subaltern class refers to people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination by a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. Gramsci argued that the subaltern classes have the same complex history as that of the hegemonic classes, but they have no evident unity and their seemingly episodic totality is due to their submission to the authority of the ruling groups, even when they break with the

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[120] Antonio Gramsci, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari, *Prison Notebooks 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), §48 Charles Maurras' Reverse Jacobinism §54 The Battle of Jutland
[121] Antonio Gramsci, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari, *Prison Notebooks 4* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), §1 If one wants to study a conception of the world
[122] Antonio Gramsci, trans. Joseph A. Buttigieg and Antonio Callari, *Prison Notebooks 3* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), §14 Father Bresciani's Progeny

established system. The subaltern classes 'are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States'[123].

Therefore, the subaltern space exists underneath whichever political government is in charge and is reproducible. The only way for the subaltern class to reach the state of freedom is 'by releasing the subordinated consciousness of non-elite group from the cultural hegemony exercised by the ruling class'.[124] It is particularly important for this research to attend to the Chinese peasantry space and history, which is very much intertwined with the history of the state. The Chinese peasantry were brought under the party through the transition from a feudal to a socialist society, with the land redistribution, the agricultural collectives, the struggles between left and right within the party (disagreement during the Leap Forward), their consciousness was released by the communist party. However, the peasantry's seemingly episodic totality during collectivisation is due to their submission to the party authority.

Besides Notebook 25, other notes are also pertinent to Gramsci's treatment of subaltern classes. Gramsci's analysis of the subaltern is interwoven with his political, social, intellectual, literary, cultural, philosophical, religious, and economic analyses, dealing with closely related issues such as the detachment of Italian intellectuals (as mentioned in the *Southern Question*) education reform, common sense, folklore, and representations of the "humble" in literary works such as novelists' treatments of subalterns being ignored in historiography. Gramsci distinguishes the peasantry as a group within the subaltern division, and distinguished himself from previous Marxists who 'took for granted the impending expiry of the peasantry in the face of the class-conscious proletariat produced by the conditions of a post-industrial capitalist society'.[125]

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[123] Antonio Gramsci, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2007), p52
[124] El Habib Louai, "Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications", African Journal of History and Culture (AJHC) Vol. 4(1), January 2012, pp. 4-8, p5
[125] Ibid.

One thing to note is that Gramsci was not able to access the historical materials he required due to his incarceration. When he was finally able to proceed with the materials that were available to him, he was in poor health and under surveillance. In this sense, Gramsci produced the Notebooks in a subaltern position, as he was subject to the prison authorities and the Fascist government where he could not work freely. Hence his Notebooks are fragmentary, unfinished and cryptic. Having said this, it is clear from Gramsci's notes that he was interested in the subaltern subject formation; their socio-political relation that causes the formation; the political power they hold, and how they can transform their consciousness as well as their lived conditions. The Notebooks indicate Gramsci's interest in producing a methodology of subaltern historiography, a history of the subaltern classes, and a political strategy of transformation based on the historical development and existence of the subaltern.[126]

Spatially, the subaltern space occupies a subordinated position to the ruling authority. Geographically, the subaltern space exists within the exploitation of the global South which occupies a subordinated position to the consumption of the global North. China's assembly factories are at the end of electronic supply chains, and the migrant assembly line cyber-proletariat are at the bottom in the chain of command. Again, in Foxconn, the assembly line workers are referred to as *buquanxu* workers, and *buquanxu* originates from the Taiwanese army: it is the lowest rank.[127] Therefore the new subaltern space occupies a subordinated position to the ruling authority, the global North, the demand of the supply chain and the command of the assembly line, and is reproducible.

1.3.2. Subalternity as A Space

Gramsci's analysis of the peasantry class as a social, cultural and political force aware of its distinct consciousness of subalternity is later applied and developed by other 20th century scholars, notably The Subaltern Studies Group who worked on the issue of Indian peasantry historiography. Ranajit Guha further developed Gramsci's analysis by

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[126] Marcus Green, "Gramsci Cannot Speak: Presentations and Interpretations of Gramsci's Concept of The Subaltern", *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 14, No. 3, Fall 2002, p3
[127] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave*, p81

attempting to show that the Indian peasants were socially and politically aware of the effect that their uprising would have on the colonial administration. The Subaltern Studies Group is defined as 'a name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way'.[128] The subaltern as a defined entity comprises the general Indian population, who are not the foreign elite and indigenous elite. Guided by Guha's view, the study of the Indian subaltern groups became an 'objective assessment of the role of the elite and as a critique of elitist interpretations of that role'.[129]

The Subaltern Studies Group conceives the distinction between the elite and the subaltern through the notion of political mobilisation. The elite political mobilisation is fulfilled through appropriation of the British parliamentary institutions and laws, and the subaltern political mobilisation is founded on classical forms of social organisation including blood relationships and kinship, territoriality, traditional and tribal affiliations where popular mobilisation take the form of peasant insurgencies and regional demonstrations. This leads to the consistent character that defines the Indian subaltern which is resistant to the imposed domination of the elite class, no matter how heterogeneous the subaltern groups might be. [130] As a result, the Indian bourgeoisie failed to speak for the nation, and the nation failed to objectively exist without any representations formed by the colonial regime.

The history of Chinese peasantry is exemplified by the country's party authority during the rural reform; prior to this, Chinese peasantry was subordinated to the land owners. The colonial imperialists only occupied parts in China but did not dominate the country. In contrast, the Indian national history has been dominated by colonial and nationalist bourgeois elitism that were produced by British colonialism during different historical periods. This elitist historiography cannot transmit, analyse or acknowledge the contributions brought by common people (the subaltern) because individual subjects were independent from the elite groups. This inability to acknowledge these subaltern

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[128] Ranajit Guha, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Oxford University Press, 1988), vii
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

contributions by the elitist historiography is clear enough in a "politics of people" persistence to exist even when the elite politics dissipate.[131] And this is partially translated from Gramsci's observation of the subaltern space existing underneath whichever political government is in charge and is reproducible.

Spivak observes the Subaltern Studies Group's project and states its purpose as being 'to rethink Indian colonial historiography from the perspective of the discontinuous chain of peasant insurgencies during the colonial occupation'.[132] When Spivak first wrote the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak*? in 1983, Spivak saw Subaltern as a differential space after being informed by Guha's work, in which he distinguishes the subaltern from the elite. At the time of the revision of the essay in 1988, Spivak was already using subaltern with the specific sense of 'without the access to the lines of social mobility rather than the name of difference':[133] she was talking about the subaltern space as defined by Guha, the space that is cut off from the lines of mobility in a colonised country.[134] This research approaches Tian Yu's subalternity not by distinguishing her from the mass. The question of Tian Yu's subalternity arises most acutely with her suicide attempt, which was due to her being cut-off from the access to the lines of social mobility.

1.3.3. Silencing

Pun sees the minor genre of resistance in her work of *dagongmei* as comprising dream, scream, faint, menstrual pain, inner splitting of self, workplace defiance, slowdowns, fighting, running away. Pun takes the minor genre from Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature which is constructed by a minority within a major language and that is political. The political acts of the minor genre of resistance have eventually escalated to what is now being called the Foxconn "suicide express". Pun and Chan interpret Foxconn workers' suicide acts as protest against a global labour regime, but state that, 'Suicide is the most desperate form of protest. It should not be used as a means to resist social injustice.'[135]

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[131] Louai, "Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak", p6
[132] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p270
[133] Spivak, "The Trajectory of the Subaltern in My Work"
[134] Spivak, "Subaltern Talk", p288
[135] Chan; Pun, "Suicide as Protest for the New Generation of Chinese Migrant Workers", p21

Here, it is not a question of what the future victims should or should not do in their own form of protest, it is a question of the ability to read such resistance. With the scholars hoping for the workers to find their own "voices" through unionisation, it is evident to say the lines of social mobility have been cut off, and "the possibility of collectivity itself is persistently foreclosed"[136] through the manipulation of (gendered) subaltern agency. There is no voice to be heard whatsoever.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, where Marx wrote class formation of the French peasantry,

> 'Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not constitute a class. They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention.'[137]

Spivak points out that "incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name" should be translated as "to make their interest count" from the German text.[138] In other words, it means to have what they are saying be recognised. It was not a question of asserting anything, and this leads Spivak to the notion of the recognition of agency. If what they are saying was not recognised, this idea of non-recognition of agency thus became imbricated with the idea of subalternity. And agency for Spivak is 'an institutionally validated action, assuming collectivity, distinguished from the formation of the subject, which exceeds the outlines of individual intention'. [139]

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[136] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p283
[137] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Rockville: Serenity Publishers, 2008), p62
[138] "The Trajectory of the Subaltern in My Work", a talk Spivak delivered at University of California, Santa Barbara in September 2004 where she takes issues with Western intellectuals' account of their inability to mediate the historical experience of the working classes and the underprivileged of society. University of California Television (UCTV), "Gayatri Spivak: The Trajectory of the Subaltern in My Work", *Youtube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZHH4ALRFHw&t=2574s [Accessed 29 May 2018]
[139] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p432

When Tian Yu was describing to the researchers the circumstances that led to her leap, she said that she was often being shouted at on the assembly line.

> 'I never cried (after being wronged). At the end of day, after working night shift, I was so exhausted and really sleepy upon taking a shower. How could I have time to cry or even think about it?
>
> As a newbie, I was timid. Fresh from school, I did not have much social experience. I would not know how to argue (with the line leader). I did not think about confronting him. I never had that thought. I was too obedient.'[140]

While Tian Yu was not being paid, she spent a day searching for the right office in the other plant, Guanlan. But the managers and administrator kept deflecting responsibility, so she could not track down her wage card and felt angry. [141]

> 'There, at Guanlan, I didn't have any idea how to get my salary. I simply ran from one building to another, getting nothing in the end. Nobody cared. There wasn't a way, completely no way. You were full of grief. And when you were back, you again went from one department to another. And I didn't know. I felt strongly, with so many things adding together, and I collapsed.
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> When I came back, it was really late, with dorm lights all off … I lied down, feeling so … frustrated and infuriated. I lied there thinking, I didn't know what I was going to do. I really didn't think of going to work. Not at all.
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> Anyway I myself wasn't even aware of all these [matters]. At that moment, my brain went blank, real blank. I didn't know what to do… then I woke up and found myself in ICU (intensive care unit).' [142]

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[140] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave*, p83
[141] Qiu, "Deconstructing Foxconn"
[142] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave*, p85

Subaltern is *situational*, and 'we are never looking at the pure subaltern'.[143] In Spivak's essay, she gives an example of a woman from her own class, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's, who committed suicide in 1926. After an unsuccessful political assassination, and yet aware of the practical need for trust, Bhuvaneswari committed suicide. By waiting for menstruation, Bhuvaneswari was protesting against contemporary gendering as well as moving against Sati-suicide in an interventionist way. Sati-suicide is the self-immolation practiced by widows upon the death of their husbands, and the widows could only conduct the immolation while they were cleaned from menstruation. The British ruler eventually abolished Sati-suicide by law in 1829, but the indigenous insisted "the women actually want to die". The abolition of the widow sacrifice by the British has been interpreted by Spivak as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men'. She writes, 'It must be remembered that the self-immolation of widows was not invariable ritual prescription.' Within the two contending versions of freedom (abolition of the practice and they want to die), in the case of widow self-immolation, 'ritual is not being redefined as patriarchy but as *crime*.'[144] Spivak translates this verse 'As Long as the woman [as wife: stri] does not burn herself in fire on the death of her husband, she is never released [mucyate] from her female body [strisarir – i.e., in the cycle of births].' to: kill yourself on your husband's pyre now, and you may kill your female body in the entire cycle of birth; as if the emphasis on free will establishes the peculiar misfortune of holding a female body.[145] In the end, the woman's voice disappeared between imperialism and patriarchy, subject-constitution and object-formation, as she was caught between tradition and modernisation, culturalism and development.[146]

Bhuvaneswari "wrote with her body" with the attempt to "speak" across death, she tried to represent herself, but her suicide was not recognised as resistance by many. Bhuvaneswari's suicide was seen by Spivak as an effort that is bringing subalternity into crisis – a subaltern insurgency, and this sees its possible shift into a space where political movement can take place.[147] Spivak remarks that since the formation of the subaltern

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[143] Spivak, "Subaltern Talk", p289
[144] Ibid. p295-296
[145] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p299
[146] Ibid. p235
[147] Spivak, "Subaltern Talk", p290

subject, women's subject formation was not touched, that 'there is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak'.[148]

Tian Yu's mind went blank, real blank, she had no words but anger, but she also "wrote with her body" with the attempt to speak for herself. The accumulated effects of endless assembly line toil, long working hours, harsh factory discipline, a friendless dormitory, rejection from managers and administrators, with the factory unable to pay her wage, and not being able to make contact with family, silenced Tian Yu. And the silencing continues after her leap as it could not be recognised as an act of resistance. Thus, 'the subaltern cannot speak' means that even though the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, not able to be attended to. Even when the subalternity is being brought to a point of crisis, cut-off from lines of mobility, such a case of a subalternity is undermined.

In the Chinese context, the first women's movement in Chinese history was named May Fourth Feminism, which refers to the May Fourth Movement during the 1910s and 1920s when mostly intellectuals protested against the corruption and incompetence of warlord government and against foreign invasion in China. Notably, the activists and reformers during the movement were mostly male, and it was they who concluded that the problems within the Chinese family structure were among the main reasons for China's underdevelopment. These male intellectuals argued that women's lack of education and bounded feet prevented them from bearing and raising a healthy and strong future Chinese population. The May Fourth Feminist movement had its impact on only a small number of urban and elite women, while the majority of women from the rural regions were only impacted minimally by this movement. After the revolution of 1949, the new government made a firm commitment to ensure the equality between women and men, as Mao once said that 'women hold up half the sky'. Since then, a law was implemented whereby women share equal rights with men in political, economic, cultural, educational and social life, and in addition, freedom of marriage for men and women was put into effect. In 1950, the Land Law and the Marriage Law were both adopted by the party, and

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[148] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p307

campaigns were put up by the government that advocated free marriage, free divorce and economic independence. Women who were not happy in their arranged marriage sought and were granted divorce. At the same time, there were campaigns to mobilise women to participate in the labour force that was demanded by the restructuring of the industrial economy, and establishing social institutions and services. Women and men were recruited for various occupations in need of a labour force. 'Much of the recruitment involved the relocation of large numbers of women from rural areas to the city, from densely populated areas to scarcely populated areas, and from regions with a gender-neutral distribution of labour force to areas with a concentration of female-oriented employment such as textile and silk production, and other light industries.'[149] When the government realised that the economy could not absorb the amount of labour power in 1953, women were then encouraged to be socialist housewives and model mothers, focusing on domestic responsibilities, and again falling back onto the domestic division of labour. During the agricultural collectivisation and the Great Leap Forward, women were yet again persuaded to join the labour force, especially in the fields vacated by men who had been transferred to male-oriented industrial occupations. Some scholars point out that women's issues were completely ignored during the 10 years of Cultural Revolution as women were either hardly differentiated from men or they were simply rendered masculine.[150] Since the economic reform, the market economy has been playing an important role in the urban economy, and the sexual division of labour propelled migrant women to become part of the exploited casual labour forces in the capitalistic mode of production, as we have previously discussed in the post-socialist labour identity section.

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[149] Yuhui Li, "Women's Movement and Change of Women's Status in China", *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, Jan 2000, pp.30-40, p32

[150] Wang Zheng, "Maoism, Feminism, and the UN Conference on Women: Women's Studies Research in Contemporary China", Journal of Women's History, v8, n4, 1997, pp.126-153

1.3.4. The Exploited Subaltern

The problems emerging out of *Can the Subaltern Speak?* for Spivak are: (a) the problem of subjectship and agency, with 'the possibility of collectivity itself [is] persistently foreclosed through the manipulation of female agency',[151] and she herself rejecting Gramsci's assertion of the autonomy of the subaltern groups. (b) The call to build infrastructure in a colloquial (not in the Marxist sense), so that agency would emerge. What she means here is that the infrastructure must be built in order for the subaltern to be heard. In recent years, Spivak noticed the gendered subaltern kept moving down the social strata.[152]

Although Spivak did not come to the subaltern from Gramsci,[153] she does remark on Gramsci's concerns of the role of the intellectual in the subaltern's cultural and political movement into the hegemony. Spivak also recognises that 'Gramsci considers the movement of historical-political economy in Italy within what can be seen as an allegory of reading taken from or prefiguring an international division of labor'.[154] Deleuze's statement mentioned in the introduction[155], also ignores the international division of labour, and the invocation of the workers' struggle reveals that Deleuze was not taking global capitalism into account. 'The subject-production of worker and unemployed within nation-state ideologies in its Center; the increasing subtraction of the working class in the Periphery from the realization of surplus value and thus from "humanistic" training in consumerism; and the large-scale presence of paracapitalist labor as well as the heterogeneous structural status of agriculture in the Periphery' illustrates the very conditions produced by global capitalism. Spivak stresses the fact that to ignore the international division of labour is to render "Asia" (and on occasion "Africa") transparent (unless the subject is ostensibly the: "Third World")'[156]. And, Deleuze's use of "concrete experience" of "what actually happens" in a factory, in a school, in barracks, in a prison,

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[151] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p283
[152] Spivak, "The Trajectory of the Subaltern in My Work"
[153] Ibid.
[154] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p283
[155] 'We are unable to touch [power] in any point of its application without finding ourselves confronted by this diffuse mass, so that we are necessarily led … to the desire to blow it up completely. Every partial revolutionary attack or defense is linked in this way to the workers' struggle.' Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p272
[156] Ibid.

in a police station again shows a lack of awareness of globalizing capital by brandishing concrete experience, which can dangerously help consolidate the international division of labour by making one model of "concrete experience" *the* model.[157]

What Spivak is invoking here, regarding Deleuze's incapability to take the international division of labour into account is that, class, the workers' struggle, the super-exploited women are all affected by socialised capital, including the subaltern who is remotely affected by it too. Though Spviak eventually turned to a gendered subaltern from her own class, throughout the paper, she continuously problematises (class) consciousness, and class formation that no longer fits within socialised capital. As she remarks, the contemporary international division of labour as 'a displacement of the divided field of nineteenth-century territorial imperialism', as first-world in the position of investing capital, and third-world providing the field for investment, is made possible 'through the comprador indigenous capitalists and through their ill-protected and shifting labor force'.[158] She further notes, 'With modern tele-communications and the emergence of advanced capitalist economies at the two edges of Asia, maintaining the international division of labor serves to keep the supply of cheap labor in the comprador countries.'[159]

The example of Bhuvaneswari is not an example of what Spivak calls a "true" subaltern: Bhuvaneswari was, after all, a middle class girl. The domination of Bhuvaneswari was determined by gender rather than class, and she was caught within gender oppression despite the domination within the challenge of nationalism. 'For the (gender-unspecified) "true" subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself.' [160] Spivak understands Marx's descriptive definition of a class as a differential one, 'in so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that cut off their mode of life, their interest, and their formation from those of the other classes and place them in inimical confrontation

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[157] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p256
[158] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p287
[159] Ibid.
[160] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p272

[feindlich gegeniiberstellen], they form a class.' Marx's contention here is that a class can be a differential one – in its cutting off and difference from all other classes[161].

> '… one far more pertinent to the France of the 1970s than it can be to the international periphery, the formation of a class is *artificial* and economic, and the economic agency or *interest* is impersonal because it is systematic and heterogeneous. This agency or interest is tied to the Hegelian critique of the individual subject, for it marks the subject's empty place in that process without a subject which is history and political economy'.[162]

Spivak explains that in both the economic area (capitalist) and in the political (world-historical agent), Marx is obliged to construct models of a divided and dislocated subject whose parts are not continuous or coherent with each other. [163] She further notes Marx's transformative definition of class: 'In so far as … the identity of their interests fails to produce a feeling of community … they do not form a class.' [164] "The feeling of community" belongs to national links, or political organisations within which class consciousness remains.[165] The non-formation of a transformative class is applicable when defining the cyber-proletariat where amongst them, they share no feelings of community.

Spivak discusses the *emergence of the new subaltern* in the New World Order: she sees the contemporary international division of labour as a displacement of the divided field of nineteenth-century territorial imperialism, where the first world countries invest capital in the third world countries. These in turn provide the field for investment through both the subordinated indigenous capitalists and the countries ill-protected and shifting labour force. She notices that, while global recession since 1979 slowed trade and investment worldwide, international subcontracting boomed. And this has made the multinationals become freer to resist militant workers, revolutionary upheavals and even economic downturns.[166] The ground of the emergence of the new subaltern is where the boundary between global and local becomes indeterminate, as Spivak explains,

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[161] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p258
[162] Ibid. p258
[163] Ibid.
[164] Ibid. p260
[165] Ibid. p261
[166] Ibid. p275

'if under postfordism and international subcontracting, unorganized or permanently casual female labor was already becoming the mainstay of world trade, in contemporary globalization, the mechanism of "aid" is supported by the poorest women of the South, who form the base of what I have elsewhere called globe-girdling struggles (ecology, resistance to "population *control*"), where the boundary between global and local becomes indeterminate.'[167]

Other than calling these poorest women of the South the emergence of the new subaltern, Spivak was using the term the "urban subproletariat" when mentioning them, and their denial and withholding of consumerism and the structure of exploitation is compounded by patriarchal social relations.

This conception of the emergent subaltern contributes to the formation of Tian Yu's identity, though she has also evolved. This research approaches her subalternity from her precarious female labour identity. Since Spivak's critique of Deleuze not being able to think of the international division of labour, as mentioned, we see that subaltern subjectship is remotely affected by socialised capital, which brings to mind Marx's remark on capital exporting only its mode of exploitation but not the mode of social production. [168] Thus, exploitation has escalated but coherent class (descriptive and transformative) formation is yet to be discussed. Since the operation of globalised capital, there are more workers working "inside the knots" of capitalism who do not think they have anything in common whatsoever. The discussion around class since the 2008 crash has become more complex, entangled, ramified, and now needs to be reconfigured. Hence Tian Yu's subalternity is perceivable through her being a cyber-proletarian.

Spivak attempts to account the Rani in history in her book *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, where she encountered rural women who could not have had a historical memory of the Rani, but who had also been historically at a distance from the culture of imperialism. She notes, 'they were the rural

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[167] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p276
[168] Spivak, "Subaltern Talk", p292

subaltern, the real constituency of feminism, accepting their lot as the norm, quite different from the urban female sub-proletarian in crisis and resistance'.[169] Tian Yu's subalternity lies in her urban sub-proletariat identity as well as her being a rural subaltern, since she returned home after becoming paralysed from the waist down after the leap. Her migrant identity and her rural identity are both being perceived in a desolate way as a norm of the mode of capitalistic production. It can be said that Tian Yu is the gender-specified "true" subaltern, whose identity is its hybridity, and her subaltern insurgency was at the crisis of being cut-off from lines of mobility.

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[169] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, p242

2. Subalternisation

Introduction

After returning home, Tian Yu does not have many friends, because all her school friends have left home to work in the cities. Most of Tian Yu's cousins are working in electronic factories in Shenzhen and other cities in Guangdong, with a few of them already in the position of line leaders. Even Tian Yu's younger sister, who dropped out of school after Tian Yu moved home and took care of her for two years, has moved to Shenzhen to work in an electronic factory. When Tian Yu's sister calls home, her first words were often "tired and sleepy".[170] Not many people of Tian Yu's age can be seen even in her hometown, only the elderly and children. And these children are referred to as the "left behind children" by their parents, who are working elsewhere. It is predicted that the number of migrant workers who have left rural areas to work in cities will rise to 300 million by 2020, eventually to 500 million.[171]

Given the fact of the huge difference between the urban and rural incomes, industrial work is desired not only because of the higher wages compared to the earnings from farming, but also for the sense of a different life that brings with it a new identity. For the early *dagongmei*, the peasantness was the negative otherness of the new identity as a factory worker. It was said that they had to negate their past identity, in order to construct a new life.[172] For Tian Yu as she had just graduated from vocational school before starting to work at Foxconn, she was a student. But it had already become the norm for Tian Yu's generation of migrants to seek urban jobs immediately after finishing school. In contrast to the previous generation of migrant workers, Tian Yu's generation are the better-educated-youths with higher expectation who dream of a life attuned to the times, of which they learnt from media and the internet.

As Pun has observed in the 1990s, industrial work was deemed to be superior to farm work, and the rural migrant girls wanted to live up to the demands of a modern world and

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[170] Tian Yu's younger sister has left the factory and works in a cosmetics store. When she calls, she sounded happier now. "Seven years after Foxconn jumped, I visited Tian Yu." *WKNews*, 20/07/2017, https://wknews.org/node/1506 [Accessed 9 April 2020]
[171] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* p127
[172] Pun Ngai, "Becoming Dagongmei", p5

thus for themselves become the modern working girls of *dagongmei*. They want to enter the factory space, but their subordinated position is only reinforced by the factory regime by way of bullying and exploitation. With the aspirations of living the dream in the city, the young rural migrant workers only find themselves facing a huge discrepancy between their expectations and reality – the long working hours and low wages. Many migrant workers have said that they all come from rural farm land, but only to realise that the factory town is where the bottom of the society really is. The rural subaltern enters a process of becoming migrant workers, but only to find out that this process further subalternises their position. When Tian Yu was asked about the device that she was conducting an inspection on, Tian Yu did not know what it was.[173] As a screen inspector, she had no idea that was an iPad. She was alienated through the global labour regime that led to her leap and being silenced.

As a part of the movement of the thesis, this chapter continues to develop from Lines of movement III of the opening movement. It comprises three parts, of which the first part focuses on the recent historical processes and development that produce forms of conditioning for the new subaltern. It draws on the work of Spivak's in order to address process of subalternisation with relation to China. The second part turns to a subtle key change to introduce a pair of themes on singularity and machine in relation to the reading of subalternisation process. The pair of themes theoretically frame not only the chapter, but also the whole thesis. It raises a question concerning the theoretical approach and methodology of the way Tian Yu's life is being read throughout this research. By situating the concept of singularity in the middle of the chapter, it allows for Tian Yu's life to occupy a central place within the thesis. The pair of themes act as a hinge, which articulates the first part and the third part by the centering of Tian Yu's singular life in relation to the wider conditionings that are being discussed. The third part elaborates on the new subalternity produced by the globalised capital, the subalternity in relation to the notion of citizen, and the new subaltern that has been incorporated into consumerism.

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[173] Oiu, "Deconstructing Foxconn"

From the middle, the chapter shifts the focus from 'who are the new subaltern' to 'what is the becoming of the new subaltern' that is addressed through the term subalternisation as a production of subalternity. Through the reading of Tian Yu's life, the chapter addresses the suspension of movement through the emergence of the new subaltern, and exams the new configurations of subalternity which have been made possible through instituting subalternisation by the state that manages the capital. Although Spivak has not used the term subalternisation in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", the emergence of the new subaltern indicates the way in which one is being subalternised through a series of new conditioning. This chapter focuses on subalternisation that is the process of becoming the new subaltern and the production of new subalternity, with the following questions: what are the historical processes producing the new subaltern? What are the recent socio-economic conditionings that silence the new subaltern?

2.1. The Emergence of the New Subaltern

2.1.1. Neocoloniality

"Subaltern" here comes to mean persons who are cut off from the lines of social mobility, as we have already discussed in the last chapter when the question of Tian Yu's subalternity arises most acutely with her suicide attempt. And "subaltern" as a term has been transformed into the description of things that do not fall under strict class analysis. For the Indian Subaltern Studies Group, who considers "subaltern" as the bottom layer of society that are not necessarily put together by capital logic alone, these persons were cut off from the cultural lines that produced the colonial subject.[174] Apart from Hong Kong, most parts of China were not subjects to colonial possession territorially, though China was invaded and had to grant many concessions throughout the nineteenth century to England, France, Germany, Russia, Japan. As discussed in the first chapter, when Britain was faced with losing its silver to China in a trade imbalance, it forcibly opened up China as a market for its opium grown with colonial Indian plantation labour. The colonial

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[174] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview" in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000), p325

conditioning is not deemphasised when working through this research and Tian Yu's subalternity.

The semi-colonial condition of China in a way propels postcolonial studies out of its continuing binarism. On the one hand, China suffered from Japan's colonial ambitions. This hinders the fixation on the colonial subject produced by the west, which is criticised through postcolonial studies as both the origin and solution to the problems of the postcolonies. On the other hand, China had an ancient centralised empire that incorporated smaller kingdoms and tribes into its own imperial system of centralised bureaucracy and tributary states. And it had attained a cultural, political and technological sophistication that surpassed that of pre-industrial Europe.

China's semi-colonial condition meant that there was no direct colonial administration that tried to alter or take away Chinese culture, as argued by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang. The integrity and very survival of Chinese culture was not felt to be threatened by imperialist forces, and therefore modernity and the cultural transformation that it entailed were not seen in China as a foreign imposition to be repelled, but an urgent self-imposed Chinese undertaking. 'Semi-colonialism in China has meant that the modern Chinese intelligentsia has been, on the whole, less critical of the West than in fully colonized places, and more able to identify with the originally Western project of modernity.' [175] The Chinese intellectuals' critiques have mainly targeted traditional Chinese culture and religion, which are regarded as unbearable burdens of the past preventing China from modernising.

> 'In contrast to India, where the East India Company deposed the Mughal emperor, in China it was a secular Republican Revolution (*Xinhai Geming*) mounted by Chinese nationalists themselves, rather than foreign imperialists, that overthrew over two millennia of Chinese imperial dynastic rule. The abandonment of this sacred monarchical system, with its elaborate ritual apparatus of imperial state sacrifice and court rituals (Zito, 1997), its scholar-officials and imperial examination system, its

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[175] Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, "Postcoloniality and Religiosity in Modern China the Disenchantments of Sovereignty", *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 28(2), 2011, Vol. 28(2), 2011, pp3-45, p19

powerful Ministry of Rites, its divination and geomantic technologies for the cosmological and spatial/territorial grounding of imperial legitimacy, and its emperor who, as the 'Son of Heaven', mediated between heavenly forces and his people on earth, was a major step in the modern secularization of China. Thus, in China, the anti-colonial movement was an integral part of both a domestic revolution and secularization process, and secularization proceeded first with the state itself, through the repudiation of the sacred sovereign power, before secularizing the society. Unlike the Meiji Restoration in Japan, Chinese nationalism and modern state formation sought a rupture with, rather than reinvention of, traditional monarchy.' [176]

As Rey Chow suggests, the ability to preserve more or less territorial integrity as well as full linguistic integrity means that the Chinese relation to the imperialist West, until China officially declared "anti-imperialism", is seldom purely "oppositional" ideologically. And it has always been an aim for China to become as strong as the West, to be West's "equal".[177] Chow questions how East Asia can be understood within the paradigm of Orientalism when, 'because of the fact that it remained "territorially independent", it offers ever better illustrations of how imperialism works – i.e. how imperialism as ideological domination succeeds best without physical coercion, without actually capturing the body and the land.'[178]

As discussed in the last chapter, Gramsci used "subaltern" instead of "proletarian" in order to escape the prison censors. But the term subaltern was able to clear a space and took on the task of analysing what "proletarian", as produced by capital logic, could not cover. In *Capital III*, Marx commented of "Foreign Trade" that capital's investment in foreign trade and colonial trade can yield a higher rate of profit, because it competes with commodities produced by other countries with less developed production facilities. So

[176] Yang, "Postcoloniality and Religiosity in Modern China the Disenchantments of Sovereignty", p19
[177] Rey Chow, "From Writing Diaspora: Introduction: Leading Questions" in *The Rey Chow Reader*, ed. Paul Bowman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p36
[178] Ibid.

the more advanced country sells its goods above their value, even though still more cheaply than its competitors. Also, the profit rate is generally higher there on account of the lower degree of development, and so as the exploitation of labour, through the use of slaves and coolies.[179] The fact that China is an exception to the rule of imperialist domination by race, land and language involving a foreign power, indeed highlights the effects of the imperialistic transformation of value and value-production more sharply than in other "Third World" cultures.[180] The incorporation of Chinese economies into a capitalist world system since the reform and opening policy infiltrated by transnational corporations has established China's export dependent economy.[181] These imply that contemporary Subaltern Studies should employ a more dynamic use of Marxian theory upon the new imperialist political economy which rests on two foundations:

> 'First, the development of new productive forces in electronics, communications, transport, logistics, and management: computers, the Internet, mobile telephones, container transport, and the development of globalized production chains with newly minted management regimes. Second, the development of neoliberalism with the removal of national barriers for the movement of capital and goods, the privatization of public and commons spheres, the establishment of new global institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), G-meetings, and other forms of global political management, and new military strategies aimed at containing and rolling back the spread of national and socialist developmentalism.'[182]

The market price of computers, smartphones and other electronic goods nowadays tends to be global but the wage differs extremely on the global level, and the redistribution of value from countries with a low market price for labour capacity is also different to countries with a high market price. Hence imperialism is to be viewed in the context of the transformation of value into price.

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[179] Karl Marx, trans., David Fernbach, *Capital: Volume III* (London: Penguin Books, 1981), p345
[180] Chow, "From Writing Diaspora", p37
[181] Though China's economy is now moving towards domestic consumption, and more than half of China's import are from Asian countries.
[182] Torkil Lauesen and Zak Cope, "Imperialism and the Transformation of Values into Prices", *Monthly Review*, July-August 2015 (Volume 67, Number 3), https://monthlyreview.org/2015/07/01/imperialism-and-the-transformation-of-values-into-prices/, [Accessed 28 September 2019]

Apple has integrated 748 suppliers of materials and components into its production chain, 82% of them based in Asia — 351 of which are in China. Between mid-2010 and mid-2011, Apple sold more than 100 million iPads. The market price of an iPad in 2010–2011 was $499, with the factory price being $275. Of the factory price, only $33 went to production wages in the South, while $150 of Apple's gross profit margin went to design, marketing, and administrative salaries, as well as research and development and operating costs sustained mainly in the global North.[183] The measurements of the value of under-payments for wage labour, reproductive labour and environmental damage in Asian countries, especially China, is what Donald A. Clelland calls the "dark value", which supports the visible monetarised flows of "bright value". Capitalists drain hidden surpluses from household and informal-sector activities. A long dark value chain of food producers and informal sector activities are incorporated to generate the productive capacity and the survival maintenance of every waged labourer. This flow of dark value lowers the reproduction costs of peripheral labour and the low wage level that capitalists pay. These household and informal sectors are not outside capitalism, but are intrinsic components of global commodity chains.[184]

2.1.2. Development

Territorial colonialism is not at an end.[185] The rural migration in the case of China is the result of urbanisation, which is a common culture fix of globalisation, along with the lack of infrastructural building tending to the rural region as discussed in the previous chapter. And most importantly, the Chinese rural migration was facilitated by the contemporary international division of labour, which Spivak calls 'a displacement of the divided field of nineteenth-century territorial imperialism.'[186] This type of territorial imperialism is driven by an economic coloniality, the neocolonialism of multinationals.

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[183] Donald A. Clelland, "The Core of the Apple: Dark Value and Degrees of Monopoly in the Commodity Chains," *Journal of World-Systems Research 20*, no. 1 (2014), pp. 82–111, p88
[184] Lauesen and Cope, "Imperialism and the Transformation of Values into Prices"
[185] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Moral Dilemma", *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 96 (2000): pp. 99-120, p100
[186] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* p274

> 'Put in the abstractions of capital logic, in the wake of industrial capitalism and mercantile conquest, a group of countries, generally first-world, were in the position of investing capital; another group, generally third world, provided the field for investment, both through the subordinate indigenous capitalists and through their ill-protected and shifting labor force. In the interest of maintaining the circulation and growth of industrial capital.'[187]

Colonialism has a civilising mission of settlement, and neocolonialism has a modernising mission of development. [188] The term "Third World" in the way it was used earlier, designates a group of desperately poor countries that are the objects of the developed world's charity. Whereas in the 1950s and 1960s, the term indicated the hope that the "Third World must start over a new history of man"[189], and of an emerging alternative to political alliance with either the First World (the United States and Europe) or the Second World (the Soviet bloc). And the unity of the Third World is a work in progress that begins with the colonised in every pre- or post-independent country, united under the leadership of the peasant class. Frantz Fanon was committed to creating a world-system of Third World nation [190] beyond communism and capitalism, which fostered a postcolonial consciousness based on the emergence of national sovereignty and international solidarity.

However, in the 1970s, the circuits of dominant capital became electronified and entered the phase of 'post-modernisation'. Robert B. Reich, the former US Secretary of Labor has called this 'electronic capitalism'.[191] The term neocolonialism is used to refer to a form of global power in which transnational corporations, global and multinational institutions combine to perpetuate colonial forms of exploitation of developing countries. It is understood as a further development of capitalism that enables capitalist powers, by both nations and corporations, to dominate subjugated nations through the operations of

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[187] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* p274
[188] Spivak, "A Moral Dilemma", p100
[189] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p238
[190] David Macey argues that Fanon's Third World is an iconic evocation Africa, a symbol of Pan-African solidarity composed of his syncretic experiences of the Maghreb, West Africa, South Africa, and the Antilles, with scant awareness of Latin America (with the exception of Cuba), Asia, or the Middle East.
[191] Spivak, "A Moral Dilemma", p100

international capitalism rather than by means of direct rule. It is impossible for developing states to escape a neoliberal economic system, in the name of "Development", which lifts the barriers between international capital and developing national economies. And now the Third World is used to refer to the countries that are "underdeveloped".

The Journal of Developing Areas published by Western Illinois University characterises a developed area as:

> (1) An economy integrated into the international industrial-commercial community
>
> (2) A substantial urban population
>
> (3) A high literacy rate
>
> (4) A high natural resource utilization rate
>
> (5) An established and institutionalized political-government system
>
> (6) General recognition as a developed area.

From this characterisation, once a country or an area is developed, its society will be urbanised, literate, and integrated into the global economy; it will use its natural resources to the fullest and have well-established institutions.[192] During the colonial period the people are called upon to fight against oppression, and after national liberation, they are called upon to fight against "poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment".[193] These are the vocabularies used for underdeveloped countries. Progress toward each of these above attributes is quantifiable, and can be tracked in the volumes of comparative statistics published annually by the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

> 'The World Bank considers countries with a per capita income of less than $12,275 as developing countries. According to the World Bank, China's per capita nominal GDP was $7,594 in 2014, which ranked 79th among 183 countries. Yet in other ways, China might be considered a developed country. Over 97 percent of Chinese have access to tap water and over 95

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[192] Nick Cullather, "Development? It's History", *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Fall 2000), pp. 641-653, p643

[193] Fanon*, The Wretched of the Earth*, p51

> percent of Chinese over the age of 15 can read and write. Additionally, 95 percent of the Chinese population owns a mobile phone.'[194]

Owning a mobile phone has now become quantifiable in the process of development. While in the eighteenth-century, observers could discern areas of life, such as government, literature, and the arts, where Asian civilisation is seen to be ahead of Europe, Michael Adas notes that by the 1880s Europeans regarded technical achievement as virtually the sole measure of human worth.[195] But against this percentage measuring, history gets lost, politics also vanishes.[196]

Development projects provide a point of entry to closed societies, or inventory resources for later exploitation. The increasing use of "cheap labour" that leads to massive labour export understood as migration, and the tremendously expensive tax-dodging "VIP migration" are both required by the same "rule of law" to manage global capital, which preserves the differences in foreign exchange to protect one of the mainstays of finance capital and innumerable other details in order to grasp that "development" as a word covers over the gap between a statistical measure and a trained epistemology. [197] "Development" is a power arrangement and an insertion into the circuit of capital, without developing the subject of its ethical, or even appropriate social use. The development of the subject is apparently in the self-interest of the "underdeveloped," while the larger pattern is the interest of developed capital. [198] This is because the state now operates by the unconstituted "rule of law" required for the management of global capital, preserving the neoliberal ideological frame. It is economic growth that is the main index of what is called "development."

'With colonialism came, unevenly, the social productivity of capital and the inbuilt mechanism for the disavowal of the imbricated increased subalternization'. Spivak

[194] "Is China a developed country?" *China Power*, 11/08/2017 https://chinapower.csis.org/is-china-a-developed-country/ [Accessed 23 May 2019]

[195] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance,* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p338

[196] Cullather, "Development? It's History", p650

[197] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Development", *Political Concepts*, https://www.politicalconcepts.org/development-gayatri-chakravorty-spivak/#ref4 [Accessed 29 May 2019]

[198] Ibid.

stresses that we must acknowledge "development" as a task – understood from the subject-formation rather than the capitalisation angle – diversely neglected also in pre-colonial time and space worldwide.[199] The postcolonial and the postnational world was opened up through "modernisation" by the end of World War II. It was inaugurated remotely by global governance signalled by the establishment of the Bretton Woods Organizations, the United Nations and the general Agreement on Tariffs and Trade between 1945 and 1948 which is the beginning of the end of European colonialism. It is also the beginning of neocolonialism.[200] The associations and intersections between decolonisation and globalisation parallels the time when the Third World as a collective subject was not bound to the confines of the nation-state, whereas globalisation speeds toward the strategic denationalisation of state sovereignty. The global aspirations of Third World national thinking belonged to the internationalist traditions of humanism, socialism and Marxism, whereas the dominant forces of contemporary globalisation subscribe to a free-market neoliberal technocratic elitism.

The concept of the Third World with its historical agency of the discourse, and its critical, political stance against the imposed univocal choice of "capitalism vs. socialism," makes it less universalist in temper and more strategic, activist, and of an aspirational character.[201] However, by measuring economic growth, the development project managed to turn to the Third World and point to this utopian anticolonial project as underdeveloped. However, as China now makes more steel than the United States does, and rolled out the 5G network before the United States did, those measurements are discarded, even though technology is treated as part of a larger configuration of material culture. Development as a subject-formation is a moving target. Its definitions shift as Europeans and North Americans change their assessments of the characteristics that indicate their own advancement in relation to others. And it is redefined as sustainable, ecologically sound, woman-centered, or conducive to a civil society depending on the latest trend in Europe and the United States. 'To be developed is to be Euro-American.'[202]

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[199] Spivak, "Development"
[200] Spivak, "A Moral Dilemma", p100
[201] Homi K. Bhabha's forward to Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, xvii
[202] Cullather, "Development? It's History", p646

The shift in the term "the Third World" from a collective project to a bunch of underdeveloped countries caused by the "Development" project is in a way similar to the shift of the term "the subaltern" to "the new subaltern". The new subaltern is subalternised by the conditions of the "Development" project.

2.1.3. Gendered Subaltern

> 'As object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.'[203]

Gramsci did include women in the subaltern social group: slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races and the proletariat. Although his project is not specifically gender-sensitive in its detail but in *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci wrote that, 'until woman has truly attained independence in relation to man, the sexual question will be full of morbid characteristics and one must exercise caution in dealing with it and in drawing legislative conclusions.' [204] Gender and the figure of woman operate in relatively unexamined ways in the Subalternists' texts. When writing on the Subaltern Studies Group, Spivak raises the importance of female subaltern instrumentality which has been overlooked in the Subalternists' work: in a collective where so much attention is rightly paid to the subjectivity or subject-positioning of the subaltern, it should be surprising to encounter such indifference to the subjectivity (as not acknowledging women are not able to inherit properties, not to mention the indispensable presence, of the woman as crucial instrument).[205]

The mode of integration of underdeveloped countries into the international economy had shifted from relying solely on the exploitation of primary resources and labour, to one in which manufacturers have gained preponderance. And this movement has paralleled the proliferation of export-processing zones throughout the world, which provides a series of

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[203] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p287
[204] Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks 1*, p171
[205] Spivak "Subaltern Studies", p296

incentives and loosened restrictions by developing countries for multinational corporations in former's effort to attract foreign investment in export oriented manufacturing. [206] As Spivak writes, 'If the peasant insurgent was the victim and the unsung hero of the first wave of resistance against territorial imperialism in India, it is well known that, for reasons of collusion between pre-existing structures of patriarchy and transnational capitalism, it is the urban subproletarian female who is the paradigmatic subject of the current configuration of the International Division of Labor.' [207]

For the project of the International feminist politics, the condition and effect of constructing other women in relation to "development" was "women *in* development". Whereas in the globalising postmodern, the other women are embedded in the more abstract frame of "Gender and development"[208], as discussed in the World Conferences on Women. The United Nations have been taking for granted the use of women since the beginning of the large-scale women's conferences. Spivak is concerned with the common currency shared in the United Nation's domain of gendered intervention as a certain broadly defined group of the world's women, 'with a certain degree of flexibility in class and politics, the assumptions of a sex-gender system, an unacknowledged biological determination of behaviour, and object-choice scenario defining female life.'[209] The use of women in the establishment is the universalisation of feminism of which the United Nations is increasingly becoming the instrument. In this re-territorialisation, such collaborative NGOs are now being called an "international civil society", which is utilised precisely to efface the role of the state,[210] and to aid in a post-state system which is required by the globalisation of transnational capital. But these World Conferences on Women cannot successfully represent the small-scale struggles that daily deconstruct capital into the social. Wanning Sun a scholar in Media at Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia writes on the media (self-)representation of Chinese rural migrants in her book *Subaltern China: Rural Migrants, Media, and Cultural Practices* in which Sun

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[206] June Nash and Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, *Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), p. viii

[207] Spivak "Subaltern Studies", p300

[208] Spivak, "A Moral Dilemma", p101

[209] Spivak, "The New Subaltern", p328

[210] Spivak, "Diaspora old and new: Women in the transnational world", *Textual Practice*, 10:2, pp.245-269, p249

engages with the concept of "subalternity" mainly through the Subaltern Studies Group, and questions how China's subalterns engage in the politics of speaking about their experience, both to themselves and to the "powerful Other". [211] Through Sun's ethnographical research, aided by Chinese local labour NGOs that connect her with the workers, insight is provided into the rural migrant working girls' different lives and work, even though Sun's engagement with the term "subaltern" is distinct from that of this research.

Globalisation is often equated with migrancy and (labour) mobility. The transnational world comprises the decolonising nations that are not able to escape the constraints of the neoliberal world economic system in the name of Development. The building of social redistribution is damaged because in transnationality, what is usually meant by "the new diaspora" includes Eurocentric migration, labour export both male and female, border crossings, and the seeking of political asylum. In China, surplus labour began to migrate to urban areas for non-farming job opportunities when the restriction on labour mobility between rural and urban areas was lifted in the mid-1980s.

As pointed out by Spivak, the two prominent problems that come with making the diaspora definitive are: first, the postnationalist (NGO) talk is a way to cover over the decimation of the state as instrument of redistribution and redress. We are told to think that transnationality as labour migrancy, rather than one of the latest forms of the appearance of postmodern capital, is to work, however remotely, in the ideological interests of the financialisation of the globe. Secondly, it begins from the calculus of hybridity[212], forgetting the impossible other vision of civilisation, "the loss of language" at the origin.[213] The phrase "lost our language" is used by the Australian aboriginals of the East Kimberley region. It does not mean that they do not know their aboriginal mother

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[211] Wanning Sun, *Subaltern China: Rural Migrants, Media, and Cultural Practices*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), p39

[212] Spivak has warned against the kinds of "hybridist triumphalism" that celebrate the catch-all concept of "cultural difference" without engaging sufficiently with specific cultural differences, or that are given to utopian visions of global transcultural communities despite the obvious fact that enduring racial prejudices, cultural biases and social hierarchies, all of which persist throughout much of the contemporary world, have yet to be overcome.

[213] Spivak, "Diaspora old and new", p263

tongue; rather, it means that they have lost touch with their cultural base.[214] Language death does not happen in privileged communities, 'It happens to the dispossessed and disempowered, peoples who most need their cultural resources to survive.'[215]

When Tian Yu first came to Shenzhen, sometimes when others spoke, she couldn't understand much. Tian Yu was put into a dormitory room with no other people from her home province Hubei. 'While Mandarin is the national language in China, local dialects are commonly used among people from their native place, and these sublanguages often cannot be comprehended by outsiders.'[216] China is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-scripts country of fifty-six nations, with more than a hundred languages and ten written scripts. The predominant language in China, is Mandarin written in simplified Chinese, which is divided into seven major dialect groups that differ from each other to such a degree that dialects from different regions can often be mutually unintelligible. And the several other autonomous regions have their own official languages.[217] The subalternisation in Tian Yu's dormitory room is propelled by the factory's deliberate decision to separate dialects/languages by literally silencing the roommates. There will be no social production without language.

> 'I went to a strange new city, without school buddies. It was like, though living in the same dorm room, we [workers] didn't bind. There was no exchange among our hearts. Once in the factory, there wasn't such talk. I don't know why, there wasn't such special [opportunity to talk to fellow workers]. It might be because I didn't know how to talk to them. We were not familiar. We were like familiar strangers.'[218]

When Pun Ngai did the field work for her book *Made In China* in 1995, her merging into the workplace community was significantly aided by staying in the workers' dormitory,

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[214] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translation as Culture" in *An Aesthetic Education In The Era of Globalization* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p245

[215] James Crawford "Endangered Native American languages: What is to be done and why?", *The Bilingual Research Journal*, Winter 1995, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp 17-38, p35

[216] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p90

[217] Haiying Pan, "An Overview of Chinese Language Law and Regulation", *Chinese Law & Government*, 48:4, 2016, pp. 271-274, p271

[218] Tian Yu's testimony. Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave*, p85

where all private spaces were shared and little could be kept hidden. Trust was built as every day she chatted, ate, read, and listened to popular music with other *dagongmei*.[219] The official spoken language of the factory Pun worked at is Cantonese. The women workers were not just identified and classified as urban or rural people, but also more specifically by region and ethnic group. One-third of the women workers at Pun's factory were from villages or towns in Guangdong Province. These Guangdong women were linguistically and regionally divided according to whether they came from Cantonese-dialect areas, Chaozhou-dialect areas, or Hakka areas (only two of the women workers were Shenzhen locals). The remaining two-thirds of the total female labour force came from other provinces across China and were referred to as *Waisheng ren* (provincial outsiders). They were commonly nicknamed by their province of origin: Sichuan *mei*, Hunan *mei*, Hubei *mei* – where Tian Yu is from – would be called Bei *mei* (northern girls); whereas women from Guangdong Province were called Chaozhou *mei*, Canton *mei*, and Hakka *mei*. These "nicknames" were all commonly used in the workplace to identify individuals, in the daily language when workers addressed each other.

> 'The identification of a person according to region or ethnicity embodies a sense of spatial inequality far more subtle than the rural-urban disparity. Where one is from and one's dialect foretells one's status and wealth, and thus one's bargaining power and position in the workplace hierarchy. The rural-urban distinction, as a soil for nurturing differences, is deliberately divided into finely stratified hierarchies through its intersection with locality and with kin-ethnic identities.' [220]

Not all women, especially subaltern women are the same, and there are different variations of existence amongst women with regard to class, race, religion, citizenship and culture. The aspirations of the European/US women and native/diasporic elite women are completely different from those of the subaltern women. Spivak often uses the example of the World Trade Organization's rising interest in the rural and indigenous subaltern as source of trade-related intellectual property to be exploited in the arenas of biopiracy and

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[219] Pun, *Made In China*, p18
[220] Ibid. p121

human genome engineering. Here, the agent of production is no longer the working class produced by industrial or post-industrial capitalism, but the generated new subaltern subject produced by the WTO.

In the footnote of the essay "Diasporas old and new: Women in the transnational world", Spivak remarks that these United Nations initiatives in the name of woman have produced feminist apparatchiks whose activism is to organise the poorest women of the developing world incidentally in their own image, to "train them to be women". There has been attempts to access the gendered subaltern within it by defining, not her way of acting, but her ways of suffering others' action. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Spivak exemplifies the denial of self-sacrifice on the funeral pyre of woman's dead husband is treated with contempt and the society will consider her as a living example of nuptial ingratitude. Spivak argues that "Sati should have been read with martyrdom".[221] A martyr does not die for oneself. The blood is spilled for the cause of others in which one has no personal advantage. The women who burnt themselves as *satis* were martyrs, and the martyrdom lies in the fact that it is a protest against the society, which failed to recognise their role in the society along with their family. And when the British rulers tried to abolish the sati practice – "white men saving brown women from brown men" – this was so as to justify imperialism as a part of their civilising mission. *Satis* remain mute in the West's effort to speak for them, '[b]etween patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third-world woman" caught between tradition and modernization.' [222] Comparing the insurgent politics in colonial India with the subaltern politics of the Chinese revolutionary era, such as "Speaking Bitterness," (mentioned in the last chapter), the peasants were given the opportunity to narrate their past sufferings and question the landlords. The difference is that "subaltern" politics in revolutionary China was state-authorised and designated, and the peasants spoke the language of the state. Now "Speaking Bitterness" has disappeared and the workers and peasants are assigned to the socioeconomic margins of modernisation.

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[221] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", p302
[222] Ibid. p306

Now with the United Nations, there has been a major effort to bring the world's women under one rule of law, one civil society, administered by the women of the internationally divided dominant.[223] And the same goes for the exact impersonal structural replica of bringing the world's rural poor under one rule of finance, one global capital, again run by the internationally divided dominant. The global feminist universalism is usually satisfied with the coding of this abstraction as "development", and does not learn to decode. And gendering as the subject of micro-credit is the paradigm case of inefficient production of the subject of development. Microlending was the placing of the poorest women of the South upon the spectral grid of the finance capital of exchange. Paying up every week is once again the instrumentalisation of body and the money-form in the interest of the abstract.[224] Microlending dates back to 1976 when the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh began providing small loans primarily to women in small groups, a segment of society too poor to qualify for credit from the banks. This indigenous enterprise had started lending to women allegedly because the repayment rate was higher.

> 'In the Grameen Bank loan camps the coding of women was into 'discipline': up-and-down exercises (even for women in advanced pregnancy, according to my rural informants), salutes, the bank's fieldworkers always two Bangladeshi men in Western clothes. There was no freedom-of-choice coding here; the curious training into 'discipline' did not catch; even as, somewhat later, the hygienic habits imposed inside Export Processing Zones were not carried over into daily habit – a real contrast to rural primary health care practised by rural female para-medical field workers … Grameen was a bank that initially established itself upon women's good repayment record. Like the nimble fingered lacemakers moved into electronic worker-positions without identity, entailing cultural coding as 'women in development' – women's feudal loyalty was here moved into loyalty as bank-borrower. The connection

[223] Spivak, "The New Subaltern", p328
[224] Spivak, "A Moral Dilemma", p107

between credit and micro-enterprise was not necessarily perceived unless directed externally from governmental and non-governmental sources.' [225]

The World Bank factored gender into all its projects and women's micro-credit organisations were springing all over. In China, Microcredit started in the mid-1990s, when the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Bank began promoting the concept in cooperation with Chinese organisations. In the article *Microfinance in China: Growth and Struggle* published by University of Pennsylvania in 2006, it states, 'Microfinance in China is poised for a significant expansion as the government, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and commercial banks begin to explore ways to provide the country's most impoverished people with greater access to credit.' As Chinese regulations keep foreign banks out of direct involvement in the microfinance market, ProCredit, an NGO which has 19 banks around the world involved in microfinancing, tried to set up relationships with the City Commercial Banks — part of China's old urban credit collectives which were reorganised into city commercial banks and exist in about 30 cities — to build up microfinancing services. And it has done this in 10 other countries. Microfinance may include several types of financial services, including deposit taking and insurance, while microcredit normally refers to small loans of between 1,000 yuan and 3,000 yuan ($125-$375). [226]

The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA), a Chinese government-affiliated NGO which charges in a range of 7% to 9%, a bit higher than the Rural Credit Cooperative (RCC), says it plans to raise its rates in the near future to the higher end of the scale. Their trick is to charge a rate that is high enough to make lending efficient, but not so high that it excludes the poor. The economist Mao Yuxi summarised it thus, 'microfinance is actually a legal usury loan.'[227] NGOs, including PlaNet Finance, ProCredit and CPAF, all made an effort to increase private sector activity. The World Bank also pointed out this trend in a

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[225] Spivak, "A Moral Dilemma", p108
[226] "Microfinance in China: Growth and Struggle", *Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania*, 10/05/2006, https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/microfinance-in-china-growth-and-struggle/ [Accessed 29 May 2019]
[227] "Gold mine or the devil? China's way out of microfinance", *Oxfam Hong Kong*, http://www.oxfam.org.cn/info.php?cid=23&id=114&p=news [Accessed 29 May 2019]

report explaining: "while most microfinance programs have been funded by governments and donors, efforts are now shifting to fostering commercial microfinance institutions… Improving the environment for microfinance can also extend more credit to the rural poor." [228] Li Changping an expert on agriculture, rural areas and farmers questions this: "[t]he rural credit cooperatives of the 1950s were supported by state policies, but they still could not serve small farmers. Why do they think that capitalists can support small farmers?" [229]

In China, most loans are also directed to women, who are seen as a better risk than men. CFPA says 40% of its existing loans have gone to women, and that new projects will focus primarily on them. "It's because women are more reliable", and "[t]hey manage money very well and they seldom go out to do migrant work or gamble or drink. And [getting a loan] can change their position in the family and empower them." [230] For the Chinese charity Happiness Engineering, the microloan project is not there to provide for the children to go to school, or the villagers to treat the disease, but only for the mother who is the leading force of a family. A poor family, first and foremost has a poor mother. As long as the mother has money, the first thing that comes to mind is to let the children go to school.[231]

Micro-loan targets poor women in remote villages and urban peripheries that have become the new frontier of empire in its form of millennial capitalism, where wealth is generated 'purely through exchange … as if entirely independent of human manufacture.' [232] The dominant is represented by the centreless centre of electronic finance capital, and the subaltern woman is the target of credit-baiting without infrastructural involvement, hence opening a huge untapped market to the international commercial sector. The word "woman" is being "culturally" negotiated: these very poor women possess their "200,000 loans averaging $300 each" and their "over 95%

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[228] "Microfinance in China"
[229] "Gold mine or the devil? China's way out of microfinance"
[230] "Microfinance in China"
[231] "Gold mine or the devil? China's way out of microfinance"
[232] Paula Chakravartty, Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Accumulation, Dispossession, and Debt: The Racial Logic of Global Capitalism—An Introduction", *American Quarterly*, Volume 64, Number 3, September 2012, pp 361-385, p363-4

repayment rate", upon the grid of the spectral network, with the extra fast turnover of finance capital, emptying money again and again of its money-being.[233] This "money grid" – the networks – is imbedded within the cybernetic metamorphosis of finance, which was accelerated by the diminishing cost of computers in the 1990s, as well as the excess bandwidth left by the telecommunications meltdown that followed the dot-com crash.[234]

From "women *in* development" to the more abstract frame of "Gender and development", the poor women are placed in a gender context, and their position is that of indebted to "development". Hence, the domination of the development project is determined by gendering. Now the rural has become the new front of globalisation through microloans to women, alongside population control, seed and fertiliser control and so on. Spivak suggests that a genuinely feminist politics would be a monitoring one, that 'forbids the ideological appropriation of much older self-employed women's undertakings and, further, requires and implements infrastructural change rather than practise cultural coercion in the name of feminism.'[235]

In the "Diasporas Old and New" essay Spivak raises issues of using high-theory when working with the conditions of women, as she writes,

> 'Aihwa Ong helped us to see how the conventional story of colonialism and patriarchy will not allow us to solve the problem. Her most telling object of investigation is so-called examples of mass hysteria among women in the workplace, and her analytical tool is Foucauldian theory. Although Ong herself is impeccable in the politics of her intellectual production, she, like the rest of us, cannot be assured of a transnationally literate audience in the United States in the current conjunctures. The habit of differance between using 'high theory' to diagnose the suffering of the exploited or dominated on the one hand, and a self-righteous unexamined empiricism

[233] Spivak, "A Moral Dilemma", p108
[234] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat*, p95
[235] Spivak, "The New Subaltern", p328

or 'experiencism' on the other produces the problem of recognizing theory when it does not come dressed in appropriate language.' [236]

I too, find myself unwilling to follow along the lines when Pun Ngai describes the genealogy of *dagongmei* as a subject derives from Foucault's "techniques of the self". As argued by Foucault that attends to 'the procedures, which no doubt exist in every single society, suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends, through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge'. [237] The turning from a rural migrant body into industrial worker is seen by Pun as the individuating of the modern self, to govern oneself in order to become a *dagongmei*. This individuating as a social struggle is precisely what was not attainable for Tian Yu.

Pun turns to Foucault on many occasions: the disciplinary society when describing the factory, the sexed body when discussing gendering, the reading of dream when analysing *dagongmei's* scream and dream, the using of "heterotopia" to describe socialist society meeting global capitalism; it goes on. However, it is pertinent for us to turn to Foucault's notion of conceptualisation: 'conceptualization should not be founded on a theory of the object—the conceptualized object is not the single criterion of a good conceptualization. We have to know the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualization. We need a historical awareness of our present circumstance. The second thing to check is the type of reality with which we are dealing.'[238]

Spivak admits that she is defeated by East Asia on the matter of dealing with diasporic women, as she writes,

> 'And East Asia. As controlling capital often a major player with the North. As superexploited womanspace one with the South and its non-elite networks. Hong Kong unravelling the previous conjuncture, territorial

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[236] Spivak, "Diaspora old and new", p257
[237] Pun, *Made In China,* p10
[238] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power", *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982), pp777-95, p778
http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343197 [Accessed 8 April 2020]

imperialism, the mark of Britain. China unravelling a planned economy to enter the US-dominated new empire. Economic miracle and strangulation of civil society in Vietnam. New World Asians (the old migrants) and New Immigrant Asians (often 'model minorities') being disciplinarized together. How will I understand feminist self-representation here? How set it to work? How trust the conference circuit? A simple academic limit, marked by a promise of future work.'[239]

Even though the Chinese Communists once served as the anti-imperialist inspiration for other cultures and progressive Western intellectuals, but that dream of a successful and consistent opposition to the west on ideological grounds has been dealt by events such as the Tiananmen protest in 1989, in which the Chinese government itself acted as if it were one of its capitalist enemies.[240] Nevertheless, the fundamental difference is that for China, the state manages the capital. Whereas for the US, the state is managed by the capital. Tian Yu perhaps is a different kind of new diaspora (the old as through slavery and coolie trade, and the new as through transnationalisation), who migrated within her own country to work for a multinational, as an extended branch facilitated by transnationality. The loss of contact with the idiomatic indispensability of the mother tongue for her was almost immediate as she was unable to find a friend from her home town in Foxconn.

Spivak quotes the warning issued by Mary Maboreke, Professor of Law at the University of Zimbabwe:

'Zimbabwe attained independence on 18 April 1980.... As of 1 October 1990, Zimbabwe abandoned its strict trade controls over trade liberalization.... [(T)he new economic order flashes] a warning light. All the gains made so far would vanish. Analyses of how deregulation programmes affected women should have been done before the problems arose. It is now rather late to demand the necessary guarantees and protections. As

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[239] Spivak, "Diaspora old and new", p262
[240] Chow, "From Writing Diaspora", p36

it is we have lost the initiative and are now limited to reacting to what authorities initiate.'[241]

Although this research comes after the effect (crisis-management) rather than before the problems arose (strategy), which is obviously too late to demand the necessary protections. Whether Tian Yu had spent 30 days, 30 months or 30 years in Foxconn, subalternisation does not stop. Subalternisation is a process of conditioning, it produces a space in which such a condition turns one into subaltern. Today, Foxconn workers are required to download the company app, which include a micro-lending service, and in addition, Apple and Foxconn are going to start assembling their flagship phones in India. To set the monitoring of subalternisation to work, we must not forget the cases of singular subaltern insurgencies. And remember that to historicise the subaltern is not to write the history of the singular.[242]

2.2. A Life in the Machine

2.2.1. Singularity

Society is ordered according to a visual aesthetic by laying boulevards and using standardised measures to create a governable populace, which 'allowed rulers to govern by manipulating abstractions (unemployment, literacy, resource utilization) instead of the messy singularities of real life.'[243] The particularity of the word "subaltern" that this research has taken on is: to be removed from the lines of social mobility. The notion of "singularity" here is not to be conflated with the notion of particular. There are specificities to the notion of "subaltern" that have been theorised by others, but in this research, it enters from the singularity of Tian Yu. This research focuses on Tian Yu as a life rather than a case amongst others. To engage with Tian Yu through the notion of singularity is to engage with one that is Tian Yu, and not some. The concept of singularity allows for this to be addressed on a theoretical level.

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[241] Spivak, "Diaspora old and new", p 255-256. Also see "Women and law in post-independence Zimbabwe: experience and lessons" in Putting Women on the Agenda, ed. Susan Bazilli (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991), pp. 215, 236-7

[242] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p442

[243] Cullather, "Development? It's History", p651

In the essay "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular" from her book *An Aesthetic Education In The Era of Globalization*, Spivak addresses the question of how the notion of subaltern is not to be identified with the idea of popular. The differentiation between subalternity (that is, what makes it subaltern) and the popular must concern itself with singular cases.[244] When considering the repetition of singular subalternity, Spivak references Gilles Deleuze's notion of singularity and writes, 'singular is not the particular because it is an unrepeatable difference that is, on the other hand, repeated – not as an example of a universal but as an instance of a collection of repetitions.'[245]

To address the question of singularity in relation to repetition, Gilles Deleuze stated at the beginning of *Difference and Repetition*, that 'If repetition exists, it expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular, a distinctive opposed to the ordinary, an instantaneity opposed to variation and an eternity opposed to permanence.'[246] The first two elements of singularity and universality in the quotation are crucial to this thesis. If the universal logically applies to all, the particular applies to only some (in the sense of not-all); whereas the singular applies to one, and only one, while the general applies to some (in the sense of not-one, but several). Singular is not the particular as the particular applies to only some; the singular applies to only one.

If repetition exists, one needs to think singularity and universality as Deleuze suggested, rather than to think general and particular. Singularity serves to articulate the concept of repetition. Singularities are the actualisation of a difference. What is repeated is different-in-itself, so singularity means something different-in-itself, just as difference-in-itself conversely has to be singular in order to be a positive differing.[247] Deleuze wrote in "Immanence: A Life", that 'pure immanence that it is A LIFE'[248]. And as Spivak writes, 'singularity is life as pure immanence.'[249] Singularities are not something outside of

[244] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p431
[245] Ibid.p430
[246] Gilles Deleuze, trans., Paul Patton, *Difference and Repetition*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p2
[247] Peter Borum, "The Notion of 'Singularity' in the Work of Gilles Deleuze", Deleuze Studies, Volume 11 Issue 1, pp95-120, p96
[248] Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, (New York, Zone Books, 2001), p27
[249] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p430

something but are strictly immanent in it. Though they are not the qualities (such as colour, texture, taste, etc.) or shape of things. Rather, singularities are those within something that will generate qualities and shape when it enters into a particular field of forces that are of conditionings. The conditionings would then lead to the genesis of other qualities and shapes. For Deleuze, 'singularities are turning points and points of inflection; bottlenecks, knots, foyers, and centers; points of fusion, condensation, and boiling; points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points.'[250]

When the interviewer asks Tian Yu：'What is it that led you to generate such an impulse to jump off the building at the time?' Tian Yu looked up while listening to the question and then looked down, 'It was because someone in the factory scolded me. I also felt bored in the factory. When I asked them for the pay, they told me 'it's at Guanlan'. I went to Guanlan to building C10, the people there said it was at B4… B1, or B2.' Tian Yu looked up again, 'I went to the fourth floor, back and forth between the two buildings, became very angry…' And her voice went quiet at the same time as she *looked down* again. For Tian Yu, the turning points are those described between her looking up and looking down. The subaltern life (singularity) of Tian Yu was brought into crisis when she reached the point of anger and helplessness after being overworked and a day of searching.

> 'But we shouldn't enclose life in the single moment when individual life confronts universal death. *A* life is everywhere, in all the moments that a given living subject goes through and that are measured by given lived objects: an immanent life carrying with it the events or singularities that are merely actualized in subjects and objects. This indefinite life does not itself have moments, closes as they may be one to another, but only between-times. Between-moments; it doesn't just come about or come after but offers the immensity of an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened, the absolute of an immediate consciousness…'[251]

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[250] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1990), p63
[251] Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, p29

As Tian Yu reiterated what happened again in the interview while looking up, 'It is because the work was done slowly, and I was being scolded. When I asked him for the pay, he said 'it's at Foxconn Guanlan building C10'. I spent a long time looking for the building, I went back and forth between buildings and could not find it. I was very angry when I got back.' Tian Yu blinked with a frown and said, 'so I did this kind of thing.'[252] The singularities and the events that constitute *a* life coexist with the accidents of *the* life.[253]

Suicides happened repeatedly at Foxconn, but the lives (singularities) that rode the Foxconn "Suicide Express" cannot be repeated. Each of the subaltern effort of bringing subalternity into crisis is different-in-itself that cannot be repeated. Difference is one of the central notions to postcolonial studies, which as a process never is "given" as a natural fact. Difference is to be considered the limit of translatability in as much as a word, or a value, or a pattern of behaving will remain "other". [254] Lives (singularities) are the actualisation of a difference. And subaltern life cannot be translated and generalised according to hegemonic logic, and that is what makes it subaltern. Any differentiation between subalternity and the popular must thus concern itself with singular cases.[255] Hence the importance of reading the singular subaltern resistance of Tian Yu.

> 'Subalternity is a position without identity. It is somewhat like the strict understanding of class. Class is not a cultural origin, although there is working class culture. It is a sense of economic collectivity, of social relations of formations as the basis of action. Gender is not lived sexual difference. It is a sense of the collective social negotiation of sexual differences as basis of action. Race assumes racism. Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action. The early subalternists looked at examples where subalternity was brought to crisis, and a basis for militancy was

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[252] "Deconstructing Foxconn"
[253] Deleuze, *Pure Immanence*, p29
[254] Bridget Wagner, "Cultural translation: a value or a tool? Let's start with Gramsci!", *Goethezeit Portal*, http://www.goethezeitportal.de/fileadmin/PDF/kk/df/postkoloniale_studien/wagner_cultural-translation-gramsci.pdf p6 [Accessed 28 September 2019]
[255] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p431

formed. Even then colonial and nationalist historiography did not recognize it as such.'[256]

The importance within this context here is the notion of subaltern. The strict understanding of a subaltern life is that it is different-in-itself and does not inhabit a space that is identical or continuous with the "popular". The word "subaltern" must be distinguished from the idea of the "popular" since the subaltern is cut off from lines of social mobility. Subalternity repeats as singular. The repetition of subalternity does not pertain to the popular. Subaltern life is the one life that is singularity. Subaltern does not belong the fixation of a category. It is non-identitarian. It negotiates its differences within itself by living one's life, not with others.

Sun writes, 'we cannot assume that all rural migrants identify with the position of subalternity.'[257] In the book, Sun explores the connection between "subaltern" and its Chinese translation "*diceng*", which literally means the bottom of a pile to denote those in the lowest economic echelon as a way of examining the issue of class and class analysis. Sun considers *diceng* exists independently of the word "subaltern" because it evades a critical question raised by the Subaltern Studies Group regarding the reciprocal mutually constitutive relationship between those at the bottom and those groups in the middle and at the top, as well as the anchoring of their lack of power in their economic circumstances sidesteps the question of whether the disadvantage of *diceng* also manifests itself in cultural, educational and political realms.[258]

The Chinese translation of subaltern is not close to the connotation of "subaltern" that has been discussed in this research. Spivak critiques Guha's use of "subaltern" in the early writings, where "subaltern" was used indistinguishably from "people" as he described in "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India".[259] Guha's synonymous use of subaltern and people is precisely generalised according to hegemonic logic. To

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[256] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p431

[257] Sun, *Subaltern China*, p38

[258] Ibid. p11

[259] Guha explains that the term "people" and "subaltern classes" have been used as synonymous thought out the note. Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi, (London: Verso, 2000), p7

understand that subalternity is a position without identity, in this case, subaltern takes on an identity in the name of "people". Here, the collective was not doing the work to subvert the conformity of the subaltern to its own social norms. As if they were the exemplary subaltern that has been hegemonised. To name the subaltern as "people" makes it a noun that cannot enter into singularity. Hence, the limiting of the subaltern within the historiographical in the Subaltern Studies.

Therefore, subalternisation – the process that makes one subaltern – does not happen amongst people. It is a singular process in one life through layers of conditioning. No one can call oneself a subaltern in whatever language. Spivak remarks that neither the groups celebrated by the Subaltern Studies Group nor Bhubaneshwari Bhaduri, 'insofar as they had burst their bonds into resistance, were in the position of subalternity'. [260] Because, their actions are later being recognised; because to understand subalternity strictly, is where social lines of mobility are being cut off and do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action. But it is important to make unrecognisable resistance recognisable in the effort of attempting to grasp subalternity.

The singular subalternity that is a life is repeated, with a difference. Such differently repeated lives (singularities) collectively are a multiplicity, but not a collective, not to be subsumed. They exist as a multiplicity of that singularity. And the question is how do we understand this multiplicity through the contemporary conditionings? This multiplicity exists without class consciousness. As a concept, singularities question both identitarianism as it combats a thought predicated on the concept of general and particular. Singularities are central actors in the process of subalternisation, though the singular is not an individual, a person, an agent; multiplicity is not multitude.[261]

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[260] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p431
[261] Ibid. p436-7

2.2.2. Machine

If singularity questions the concept of general and particular, and the repetition of the singular is the multiplicity, then it points to the question of what does (the repetition of) singularity pertain to? In his essay "Machine and Structure," published in 1971, Felix Guattari went beyond structuralism by making a distinction between the concept of "structure" and that of "machine". In the essay, Guattari took into consideration Deleuze's work in *Difference and Repetition* and *Logic of Sense* to demonstrate that 'a machine is inseparable from its structural articulations and, conversely, that each contingent structure is dominated by a system of machines'.[262] Guattari first defined the machine using Deleuze's concept of repetition, in which what is repeated is never the same, but something different.[263] Or, what is repeated is never the same, but something different-in-itself, something singular.

'The machine, as a repetition of the singular, is a mode – perhaps indeed the only possible mode – of univocal representation of the various forms of subjectivity in the order of generality on the individual or the collective plane.' [264] Singularity as different-in-itself is repeated through a process of differentiation that is the non-structural machinic repetition. The concept of machine questions how structure is produced, and denies the totality of structure. As a more dynamic concept, machine helps provide a better understanding of the subaltern in its difference to the popular.

Machine for Guattari is not reduced to questions of technology, even though it allows a different way of addressing the role of technology. Technology is to be thought of in relation to socius. Machines do not depend on *techne*, the technological machine is only one instance of machinism.

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[262] Felix Guattari, trans. Rosemary Sheed, "Machine and Structure" in *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, (New York: Penguin, 1984), pp111-19, p111 (Translation modified.)
The original quotation in French is, 'La machine, comme répétition du singulier, constitue un mode, et même le seul mode possible, de représentation univoque des diverses formes de subjectivité dans l'ordre du général sur le plan individuel ou collectif.'
Felix Guattari, "Machine et structure" in *Psychanalyse et transversalité*, Paris : Maspero, 1974, p243
[263] Edward Thornton, "The Rise of the Machines: Deleuze's Flight from Structuralism", *The Sourthern Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 55, Issue 4, December 2017, pp.379-528
https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/sjp.12261 [Accessed 28 September 2019]
[264] Guattari, "Machine and Structure", p114

'The problem of techne would now only be a subsidiary part of a much wider machine problematic. Since the machine is opened out towards its machinic environment and maintains all sorts of relationships with social constituents and individual subjectivities, the concept of technological machine should therefore be broadened to that of machinic assemblages.'[265]

Therefore, the concept of machine is to be understood as by no means being restricted to only technological machine. There are also technical, aesthetic, economic, social, etc. machines. Guattari's concept of the machine is a proposition of the universal dimension. Singularities enter into a particular field of forces, which are conditionings of the machine. The concept of the machine reassesses elements at the service of particular functions and relations of alterity. Machinic can be understood in the sense that an assemblage can unplug from a particular arrangement of elements – whether linguistic, political, aesthetic, or technical – and plug into another, more appropriate one, depending upon the needs of a given problem.[266]

The development of technology has progressed from the "Development" project as discussed earlier that is no longer just incorporating the cheap labour from the periphery and the extraction of raw materials that subalternise the subaltern. The new configurations of the subalternity of this research is produced by a constellation of machines including China's economic machine with the labour migration, and Foxconn as a social machine with cyber-proletarians spending spare time on their smart phone. These are part of the life that Tian Yu lived. What the machine produces here is subaltern subjectivity through a series of new conditioning. Subalternisation has to be understood through one single life that is Tian Yu's in this instance. But also through the series of new conditioning that is produced by the machine that concerns all. The "all" is better understood if we look at the machinic conditioning of the cyber-proletarians.

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[265] Felix Guattari, ed., Andrew Benjamin, "On Machines", *Complexity*, JPVA, No 6, 1995, p8-12
http://archtech.arch.ntua.gr/forum/post2006interaction/on_machines.htm [Accessed 28 September 2019]
[266] Jay Hetrick, "Video Assemblages: 'Machinic Animism' and 'Asignifying Semiotics' in the Work of Melitopoulos and Lazzarato", *FOOTPRINT*, April 2014, pp. 53-68, p58

The cyber-proletariat thus pertains to the machine as the "cybernetic" perspective within the term developed by Wiener (as discussed in Chapter one), and which anticipates living systems as particular types of machines equipped with the principle of feedback. The living systems of the cybernetic as machines is a productive force. In the chapter "Machinic Heterogenesis", from Guattari's last book *Chaosmosis* published in 1992, Guattari took Francisco Varela's theory of biological autopoiesis into machinic nature itself, which became the theory of autopoiesis – or the spontaneous and continually self-productive ontogenesis of living beings. The latter is liberated from the biological domain and is used to help illustrate the character of any type of machine whatsoever.[267] The autopoietic quality of machines is what differentiates them from structures or closed sets. Coherent structures imply feedback loops that give rise to interiorisation and totalisation.[268] However, the machine is shaped by a desire of abolition. Its emergence is doubled with breakdown, catastrophe – the menace of death.[269]

Guattari teased out a distinction that he found in Deleuze's work between the productive force that animates historical change and the resulting structure given at any particular moment in history.[270] 'It is at the intersection of heterogeneous machinic Universes, of different dimensions and with unfamiliar ontological textures, radical innovations and once forgotten, the reactivated, ancestral machinic lines, that the movement of history singularises itself.' [271]

Machine as a dynamic concept is not static and contains movements. It allows the process of subalternisation to be thought as being activated by the movement of the machine. However, the process of subalternisation itself is to suspend one's movement, and for one to be cut off from all lines of social mobility. Subalternisation does not belong to a structure but pertains to the machine, which is concerned with *all* in relation to the new conditionings of recent socio-techno-economic development. The process of subalternisation has to be understood on the one hand through the one and only singular

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[267] Hetrick, "Video Assemblages", p58
[268] Ibid. p59
[269] Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p37
[270] Thornton, "The Rise of the Machines"
[271] Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, p41

life, and on the other hand through the series of new conditioning that is produced by the machine that concerns *all*.

In the text "The Machine", Maurizio Lazzarato engages with Guattari's concept of machine and machinic enslavement through the reading of the television as a machine designed to interpret, select and standardise in contemporary capitalism.

> 'One can be 'enslaved' or 'subjected' to a machine (whether it be technical, social, communicational, etc.) We are enslaved to a machine when we are a cog in the wheels, one of the constituent parts enabling the machine to function. We are subjected to the machine when, constituted as its users, we are defined purely by the actions that use of the machine demands. Subjection operates at the molar level of the individual (its social dimension, the roles, functions, representations and affections). Enslavement on the other hand operates at the molecular (or pre-individual or infrasocial) level (affects, sensations, desires, those relationships not yet individuated or assigned to a subject).'[272]

Tian Yu's singularity or her singular subalternity is to be thought of here, in relation to the machine, that she is enslaved to a machine. Not just because of her inspection of the iPad screen along with putting a sticker on it, all within 15 seconds with limited movement. But also, her desire to the wonderful city life, to window-shop the smart phone. And her feeling of fury and anger when she was so desperate that her mind went blank.[273] Social subjection regards individuals and machines as entirely self-contained entities (the subject and the object) and establishes insurmountable boundaries between them. Whereas machinic enslavement considers individuals and machines as open multiplicities.[274] Machinic enslavement is not the same as social subjection which needs individuals. It activates its molecular, pre-individual, pre-verbal, pre-social dimension. As these dimensions are activated, machinic enslavement produces new subjectivities.

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[272] Maurizio Lazzarato, trans. Mary O'Neill, "The Machine", http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/lazzarato/en, [Accessed 11 February 2019]
[273] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p91
[274] Lazzarato, "The Machine"

'Capitalism is neither a "mode of production" nor a system', but rather 'a series of devices for machinic enslavement' that operates by 'mobilizing and modulating pre-individual, pre-cognitive, and pre-verbal components of subjectivity, forcing affects, percepts, and unindividuated sensations […] to function like the cogs and components in a machine'.[275] Capitalism produces class structure, and the structure it produces is dominated by a constellation of machines. Capitalism is an apparatus for machinic enslavement that captures and controls the cyber-proletariat whose subalternity is massively incorporated regardless of the remoteness of the rural area. Cyber-proletariat, in relation to class in a strict sense, is not an identity pertaining to class structure but is interrelated with the machine.

Machinic enslavement however endows capitalism with a sort of omnipotence, since it not only concerns all the roles, functions and meanings by which individuals both recognise each other and are alienated from each other.[276] No line manager, pay roll officer, co-worker, roommate cared for Tian Yu. She could find no one to help her. But machinic enslavement also produce subjectivities by putting one into service. In order to reproduce capitalist power, capital depends on lives that are put into service by machinic enslavement. 'It is through machinic enslavement that capital succeeds in activating the perceptual functions, the affects, the unconscious behaviours […].'[277] As was the case with Tian Yu, who was so desperate that her mind went blank, 'so I did this kind of thing.'[278]

2.3. The New Configurations of Subalternity

2.3.1. New Subaltern Spaces

As discussed earlier, through the electronic circuits of globalisation, the microfinance, the subaltern has become greatly permeable. As a "position without identity", subalternity is suspended from movement and situated in the space beneath the "cut off", which

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[275] Hetrick quotes Lazzarato "The Machine", "Video Assemblages", p59
[276] Lazzarato, "The Machine"
[277] Ibid.
[278] "Deconstructing Foxconn"

originally seemed to coincide with the geographical location of enclosed non-metropolitan spaces. In "The New Subaltern: A Silent Interview", Spivak urges us to rethink the "subaltern", who is 'no longer cut off from the lines of access to the centre' but corresponds to 'the rural and indigenous subaltern' and thus is incorporated by the centre, which is represented by the WTO and Bretton Woods agencies as a 'source of trade-related intellectual property or TRIPs'. [279] The subaltern here has become permeable again in the sense of 'the exploitation of the global subaltern as sources of intellectual property without the benefit of benefit sharing, pharmaceutical patenting, and social dumping.'[280] All these are the different new configurations of subalternity.

'The subaltern folks I am talking about are in our present, but kept pre-modern.'[281] However, at Foxconn the subaltern is not kept pre-modern. When thinking about the new configurations of subalternity, the interrelation of both dynamic (the subalternisation) and static (the immobility) spaces of subalternity are to be thought of together, and the articulation is constantly shaped at the pace of the movements of a borderless global capital. And the pace of the movements of which the globalisation of markets, data and migrations is proceeding has in recent decades instigated a faster and more seamless hyper-connected world, where every restriction is inevitably going to be superseded, and borders and boundaries are constantly eliminated in the new spatio-temporal dialectic of capital, which – as Marx noted in the *Grundrisse* – sees every limitation (*Grenze*) as a barrier (*Schranke*) to overcome.[282]

Capital is, in fact, borderless, but 'it has to keep borders alive in order for this kind of cross-border trade to happen'.[283] And borders, far from serving simply to block or obstruct global flows, have become essential devices for their articulation. National borders are no longer the only or necessarily the most relevant ones for dividing and restricting labour

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[279] Spivak, "The New Subaltern", p326

[280] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p441

[281] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Nationalism and the Imagination", *Lectora*, 15, 2009, pp75–98, p80

[282] Sara de Jong & Jamila M. H. Mascat, "Relocating Subalternity: Scattered Speculations on the Conundrum of A Concept", *Cultural Stu*dies, 2016, 30:5, pp717-729, p723 https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09502386.2016.1168109?scroll=top&needAccess=true [Accessed 8 April 2020]

[283] Confluencenter for Creative Inquiry, "Gayatri Spivak lecture, "A Borderless World" at The University of Arizona", *Youtube*, 26/10/2012, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3LYRYR_-XA [Accessed 2 June 2019]

mobilities.[284] Rather, the all-encompassing borderlessness of capital transcends political borderlines while at the same time, perpetuating the geographic and economic frontiers that separate the periphery from the centre, the Global North from the Global South, and endlessly create and recreate internal social fences within each of these spaces.[285] At the same time, the financialization of the globe is represented as the North embracing (organising) the South and women are being used for the representation of this unity. But neither the North nor the South can deal with the internal division within nations. 'Poor women in the North are being denied access to an existing welfare structure that is being dismantled; the poorest in the South are at the bottom of a society where a welfare structure cannot emerge because of globalized exploitation (and often, state corruption).'[286] There is not a clean North-South divide. Therefore, when dealing with new subalternity, one has to go beyond moving the subaltern from the periphery to the centre or from the South to the North, and one must pay attention to the suspension of the movement through the process of subalternisation within the new spaces of subalternity. For this research, the articulation of subalternity is concerned with the conditioning of cybernetic capital with its proliferation, but also of a heterogenisation of borders that causes the movement between work and worklessness.

2.3.2. Subaltern Citizenship

The word "*nongmingong*" is the name used for rural migrant workers in China. *Nongmingong* dominate industrial employment in the private sector and in transnational enterprises with the manufacturing sector being the major employer of migrant labour. "*Nongming*" translates to peasants, and "*gong*" stands for workers. In Chinese, there is no "migrant" element in the term, no movement mentioned. They are labelled as peasant workers. They are peasants and workers simultaneously, even though they may no longer work on a farm, or some of them may have never worked on a farm. This is especially so for the younger generation of workers, like Tian Yu, who have found work in the cities straight after their educations.

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[284] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Durham and London: Duke University press, 2013), p2-3
[285] de Jong and Mascat, "Relocating Subalternity", p724
[286] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "'Women' as Theatre", *Radical Philosophy*, 75, Jan/Feb 1996, pp.1-4, p3

Nongmingong as a term holds the tension that underlies the concept of class like the term *dagongmei*, that is between worker - class as an analytical term (objective class position) and peasant - class as an aspect of personal identity (subjective class position). But the word "peasant" in China not only indicates an occupation, the lowest stratum in the social strata, but also where they are geographically. *Nongmingong* are referred to as the floating population due to the fact that even though they work and live in the city, they still hold their *nongming hukou* – rural household registration system, as mentioned in the last chapter. *Hukou* was originally introduced to manage the large population and to keep people from relocating, in a situation where peasants were legally obligated to farm and remain in rural areas, while city dwellers were assigned to municipal work units.

While the state has been encouraging rural-to-urban migration in order to meet the demands of the export-oriented economy, it does not seem to be willing to eradicate the legal strictures. A small portion of migrant workers are able to achieve significant gains in socio-economic status and thus are able to obtain the urban *hukou* but the majority still subsist through *dagong,* work for the boss, hold the rural *hukou*, and find it impossible to achieve social mobility.

> 'In 2001, the central government mandated that towns and small cities under 100,000 inhabitants grant urban *hukou* to migrants who could demonstrate fixed local residence and stable employment for at least one year, but these criteria exclude many migrants. These policy changes also encompass several large cities, but they have been allowed to tailor *hukou* reform to local concerns. As in Jinan, Shandong Province, almost all the large cities involved have confined reforms to designated areas just inside the cities' administrative periphery, i.e., urban *hukou* status in most cities remains spatially constrained. Other major cities including Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou have implemented commodified *hukou* schemes, such as *hukou* for purchase, for wealthy migrants who buy flats

in designated development areas, and for some members of the professional class.'[287]

The urban and rural *hukou* system differentiates the nation along urban-rural lines and thus is a two-tiered form of citizenship which is in a sense of social membership.[288] It plays a pivotal role in the instituted subalternisation of the rural population through social exclusion, which manifests itself through the unequal distribution of social benefits including health care, education, housing and employment. The *Hukou* system kept Tian Yu out of urban health care and social welfare. The state can use her labour but keeps her out of the urban society. Again, to reiterate in Marx's terms, capitalism exports its mode of exploitation but not modes of social production.

During colonial Hong Kong, residents were designated "British-Dependent Territory Citizens" (BDTC) in the remnant corner of the empire, with limitless rights of travel but no rights to reside in Great Britain. When Hong Kong was handed over to China, these same residents will be called "British Nationals (Overseas)" (BNO), with the conditions of domicile and travel unchanged. Hong Kong Chinese are thus treated as an overseas population that is in, but not of the empire: their partial citizenship rests on differences: of territoriality, coloniality, and (unmentioned) non-British origins.[289]

In Britain, immigration law was modified to grant citizenship to some Hong Kong immigrants, mainly as a symbolic gesture to stem the outflow and stabilise the Hong Kong economy. The citizenship was awarded according to perceived biotypical criteria that would serve market interests. In 1990, a nationality bill granted full citizenship or "the right of abode" to only fifty thousand elite Hong Kongers and their families (about 250,000 people out of a total population of 5.7 million in Hong Kong at that time), based on a point system for distinct occupations such as accountancy and law, in this way, discriminating

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[287] Carolyn Cartier, Manuel Castells and Jack Linchuan Qiu, "The information Have-Less: Inequality, Mobility, and Translocal Networks in Chinese Cities", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, June 2005, Volume 40, Issue 2, pp 9–34, p13

[288] Sun, *Subaltern China*, p12

[289] Aihwa Ong, "On the Edge of Empires: Flexible Citizenship among Chinese in Diaspora", *positions east asia cultures critique,* December 1993, 1(3), pp. 745-778, p748

among the applicants, who had to have a higher education, were mainly in the thirty to forty year-old bracket, and presumably spoke fluent English. This special subcategory of Chinese was carefully chosen from among householders (presumably predominantly male) who have British connections in government, business, or some other organization. These Hong Kongers are indeed selected for their capacity to be normalised as British citizens and their ability to participate in the generation of transnational wealth.

Now the citizen is subject to the global capital laws. 'British immigration law creates a new ideological discourse on Overseas Chinese, who are eligible for citizenship only as *homo economicus*...' *Homo economicus* has become the code term for wealthy Chinese immigrants assumed to be disciplined and productive citizens.[290] At the same time, the nationality bill was intended as an "insurance policy" to encourage the Hong Kongers to stay in the territory. There would thus be no need to emigrate in search of a passport in case things went sour after 1997. 'Full British citizenship for even those Chinese meeting the biopolitical criteria is citizenship indefinitely deferred; the nationality law operates as an insurance against their ever becoming full British citizens.'[291]

Deng Xiaoping proclaimed the goal of creating a string of Hong Kong along the Chinese coast, to emulate the Newly Industrializing Countries or NIC model of capitalist development. Even before the tidal wave of emigration following the Tiananmen event in 1989, China tried to stem the exodus of Chinese capital and professionals from Hong Kong. Through the New China News Agency office in Hong Kong, the People's Republic repeatedly appealed to all Hong Kongers who had gone abroad to reconsider their decision, to "come back, to work for the prosperity of the land of [your] birth."[292] Hong Kong and other overseas Chinese who usually held "flexible citizenship" thus led capitalist investments in South China, setting up thousands of factories employing migrant workers (*dagongzai* and *dagongmei*), like the one Pun worked for in Shenzhen during 1995 and 1996 which was an electronics company owned by a group of Hong Kong businessmen.

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[290] Ong, "On the Edge of Empires", p771
[291] Ibid. p750
[292] Ibid. p751

Nongmingong (peasant-worker) is even more subordinated in terms of social strata compare to *dagongzai* (blue-collar male worker) and *dagongmei* (female migrant worker). Young factory workers and women in service, hospitality and domestic occupations do not identify themselves as *nongmingong* and describe themselves as *dagong*. They think *nongmingong* is a term to describe rural migrants who work on construction sites. It has been mentioned in the previous chapter that both the state and migrant workers reject the term working class and refuse class as the discursive frame to constitute their collective experience, however, *nongmingong* are precisely that kind of contractual, juridical and abstract labour subject. Even though factory workers are paid monthly wages as agreed in their contract, they are not necessarily being paid on time. Additionally, most construction workers work without signing a contact and do not get paid on a regular basis.

Nongmingong as a term is now widely used in policy statements, media reports and academic papers, as well as within some migrant worker NGOs.[293] The state is not rejecting the term *nongmingong* either. In fact, it has changed from socialism with Chinese characteristics to neoliberalism with Chinese characteristics. Sun draws on the work of Yan Hairong, an anthropologist who is an Associate Professor at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and studies the domestic workers in urban middle-class households in Beijing. Yan observes that, although domestic workers live and work under very different spatial and temporal regimes from those of *dagongmei* in factories, they are still subjected to equally palpable conditions of subordination. Constructed by their employers, supervisors and various state agencies as having backward values and an irrelevant outlook, domestic workers are judged and put in a position of moral and cultural inferiority. They are not able to engage with the dominant classes in the politics of representation nor do they have access to the institutional means of producing and legitimating their own voice. Nevertheless, Yan argues that despite the difficult circumstances under which they struggle in the city, and whether their presence is

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[293] Sun, *Subaltern China*, p14

welcomed or not, they are determined to persist and this determination to stay in the city constitutes a "conscious tactic" of the subaltern. [294]

The term *nongmingong* is 'potentially essentialist, in that it can encourage the assumption that some forms of rural migrant experience are more authentic and representative that others.'[295] From as early as the mid- 1980s, the six most common types of employment undertaken by rural migrants have been manufacturing, service and hospitality, construction, cottage style garment-processing, garbage and scrap collecting and domestic work. By 2012, the types of employment ranking from highest percentage are manufacturing, construction, domestic and other services, retail and small businesses, transport, storage and postal delivery, and restaurant and hospitality. As of 2013, the manufacturing sector has employed 35.7% of the entire *nongmingong* workforce, more than 93 million workers, with 33.6% being female migrant workers. [296]

The *nongmingong,* who are employed by those who hold "flexible citizenship" with their flexible options, are still restricted by the *hukou* system from accessing urban social welfare even though they work and live in the cities, which is the subalternisation of *nongmingong*. Thus, the notion of citizenship in relation to flexible citizenship, linked to flexible accumulation and mobile investors, should be examined in the context of the globalised economy, and in terms of the different meanings it has for different groups of people. 'Because the subaltern, any subaltern anywhere, is today, de jure, a citizen of some place or the other.' [297]

2.3.3. Subaltern Consumership

The third world labour's "cheapness" was ensured by an absence of labour laws, a totalitarian state and minimal subsistence (technical skills) required on the part of the workers. 'With so-called decolonization, the growth of multinational capital, and the relief

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[294] Sun, *Subaltern China,* p36
[295] Ibid. p13
[296] Sun, *Subaltern China*, p15
[297] Spivak, "Subaltern Talk", p307

of the administrative charge, "development" does not now involve wholesale legislation and establishing educational *systems* in a comparable way.' All these impede the growth of consumerism in the comprador countries[298] and maintain the international division of labour served to keep the supply of cheap labour in the comprador countries. Spivak stresses 'the urban proletariat in what is now called the "developing" nations must not be systematically trained in the ideology of consumerism (parading as the philosophy of a classless society) … This separation from the ideology of consumerism is increasingly exacerbated by the proliferating phenomena of international subcontracting.'[299]

Spivak finds herself remain as a "lonely gun-runner": she has heard herself describing all those concerns and found herself turning into a "permanent persuader", who is trapped in the machine.[300] The machinic quality ensures the continual emergence of the new conditionings, and is becoming the new subaltern. The urban proletariat in the "developing" nations has now been incorporated into the ideology of consumerism. Previously, the products and parts assembled or made by the subcontracted countries were re-imported to the developed countries rather than being sold at the manufacturing countries in order to ensure labour "cheapness". However, this is no longer the case today, such as in the case of a smartphone; the manufacturing country has become the market now – China is Apple's second largest market by sales in 2019.[301]

The 1990s generation of *dagongmei* within *nongmingong* cohort are subordinated to the three-way oppression of the state, patriarchy, and global capitalism. Then what about the *dagongmei* within *nongmingong* within cyber-proletariat cohort? The diversity of *nongmingong* cohort now is clear when comparing, for instance, construction site workers to factory workers. The construction site workers are mostly male and less educated; the factory workers are better educated and come to the city not only for the

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[298] A comprador is a "person who acts as an agent for foreign organizations engaged in investment, trade, or economic or political exploitation". For instance, a Chinese agent engaged by a foreign establishment in China to have charge of its Chinese employees and to act as an intermediary in business affairs.

[299] Spivak, *A Critique of postcolonial Reason*, p275-276

[300] Spivak, "Scattered Speculations on the Subaltern and the Popular", p442

[301] Alex Lee, "8 numbers that explain why Apple is kowtowing to China", Wired, 18 October 2019, https://www.wired.co.uk/article/apple-china-iphone-sales-hong-kong-protests
[Accessed 8 April 2020]

income but often with the hope of staying in the city. Construction workers tend to have more of an attachment to the farmland back at home and some go back to the farmland during harvesting season, like Tian Yu's father. On the other hand, younger factory workers commonly have access to a wide variety of entertainment and communication resources, including computer games in Internet cafes and mobile technologies such as smartphones and tablets, and many participate regularly in a variety of social media. [302]

As Tian Yu said, 'Internet technology and mobile communications has opened a window on the wealthy, wonderful city lifestyle for us.'[303] This creates the sense of aspiration for the rural population to wonder about the gleaming city life, and so to move to the city and work. However, in the Foxconn dormitory, the roommates are randomly assigned by the factory. The formation of small groups between workers is not what the factory like to see. Atomized individuals are the best, each worker is seen in letters and numbers in every building and every assembly line. The number is convenient for the management of the factory. Tian Yu and her roommates are complete strangers to each other, and with different working hours, there is very little communication between them. Yet they do the same repetitive job on the assembly line throughout the day.

> 'Operations performed by workers, technicians and scientists will be absorbed, incorporated into the workings of tomorrow's machine; to do something over and over no longer offers the security of ritual. It is no longer possible to identify the repetition of human actions ('the noble task of the sower') with the repetition of the natural cycle as the foundation of the moral order. Repetition no longer establishes a man as someone who can do that particular job. Human work today is merely a residual sub-whole of the work of the machine. This residual human activity is no more than a partial procedure that accompanies the central procedures produced by the order of the machine.'[304]

There is not so much "life" or "city lifestyle" after the working hours. Before there was an independent labour service who organised workers at the weekends, the women workers

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[302] Sun, *Subaltern China*, p15
[303] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p87
[304] Guattari, "Machine and Structure", p113

would relax by lying in bed or "playing" mobile phones.[305] The machine has now come to the heart of desire.

This phrase "play mobile phones" is directly translated from the WKNews article. In fact, the word "play" is often used in Chinese to address the using of a mobile phone. It is similar to "playing" video games or "playing" computer, especially when it is used to address the younger generation who are not necessarily using a mobile phone for their job. Because a mobile phone is a distraction, we are usually being told to stop playing (on) our phones.

What does the concept of play mean in relation to production and consumption? In *Man, Play and Games*, Roger Caillois argued that play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money for the purchase of gambling equipment or eventually to pay for the establishment.[306] He defined play as free, separate, uncertain, and unproductive, yet regulated and make-believe.[307] Aristotle puts play in the sphere of work, 'for he who toils needs rest, and play is a way of resting, while work is inseparable from toil and strain.'[308] These notions of play no longer entirely apply to the contemporary conditions. The female cyber-proletariat assemble mobile technologies on the assembly line at work and "play" mobile phones after work: this seems to be two separate modes, one of production and one of consumption. Consumption through playing is not unproductive. What is being produced through playing is user-generated data in a form of free labour with which its value is the informatics. The women workers who relax by playing mobile phones are further suabalternised even after working hours on the assembly line.

Tian Yu inspected the iPad screen endlessly every day, a labour that made her eyes feel intense pain. As she recalls, 'working twelve-hour days with a single day off every second

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[305] "Seven years after Foxconn jumped, I visited Tian Yu" *WKNews*, 20/07/2017, https://wknews.org/node/1506 [Accessed 28 September 2019]

[306] Roger Caillois, trans., Meyer Barash, *Man, Play and Games*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), p5

[307] Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, p.ix, 9-10

[308] Aristotle, *The Politics*, (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p455

week, there's no spare time to use the facilities like swimming pools, or to window shop for smartphones in the commercial districts within the enormous complex.'[309] Now, the very technology that is being assembled in the factory, its domestic subpar versions could be found within the factory campus, just a few streets down from the factory workshop. During the lunch hours at Foxconn, workers were sitting so closely to each other on the benches, but only to play their own mobile phones.[310] Consumerism has already seeped through the urban and cyber-proletariat; it has evolved as the market expanded with the proliferation of the technology. And this is the subalternisation of which the cyber-proletariat is now the producer, as well as the consumer: a subalternised producer who cannot speak to one's co-workers on the assembly line or their roommate in the shared dormitory; a subalternised consumer who does not speak to one's co-workers during the break time or after work, but only spends time on the phone screens. This is not the kind of consumerism during Fordism where factory workers would be paid enough to purchase the car that they produced. The difference between consumerism during Fordism and current consumerism is that during Fordism, subjection worked through working times. The spaces and time outside of work were defined by social subjection, but were not captured. However, within machinic enslavement, there is no separation. Workers are put into service on the assembly line. Even when they are outside the factory workshop, they are still put into service by machinic enslavement. But they do not recognise that they are put into service again because playing their phones appeals to their desires. It is a total capture through machinic enslavement.

'At Foxconn, when I felt lonely, I would sometimes chat on QQ online.'[311] In 2010, the smartphone was not as popularised as it is now. In the filmed interview with Tian Yu, between her looking up and looking down, Tian Yu describes the day leading up to the jump. When the camera zoomed out of her headshot whilst she was looking down again, she was looking down at her mobile phone. Jack Linchuan Qiu uses the term "information have-less" to describe low end ICT users, service providers, and laborers who

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[309] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p88
[310] From what I observed at Foxconn Longhua plant in 2016.
[311] QQ is an online instant messaging programmed operated by Tencent Holdings. Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p88

are manufacturing these electronics. He calls them "have-less" because, compared to the upper classes, they have limited income and limited influence in policy processes, although they have begun to go online and use wireless phones.[312]

The mode of consumption and production here is both materially (with the desire to) purchase the product and immaterially consuming and producing data by using the product. This blurred distinction between contemporary consumption and production thus applies to the cyber-proletariat who produces the product then purchases the (subpar) product and goes online to consume content and produce data during the little leisure time one has. This form of free labour finds itself at the interface of a new relationship between production and consumption. The blurred distinction between consumption and production thus further subalternises the cyber-proletariat through a total control by relentlessly having oneself produce the communicative technologies but also consume through the very technologies one produces. 'Enslavement in a sense akin to that used in cybernetics: in other words, remote control, feedback and opening up to new lines of possibles.'[313] The process of subalternisation is a part of cybernetic processes of machinic conditioning that turns the subaltern producer into the new consumer by putting one into service both at work and outside of work. Subalternisation has to be read not only through the producer but also the producer as consumer; not only through a singular life, but also through all who are conditioned by the machine.

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[312] Jack Linchuan Qiu, *Working-Class Network Society: Communication Technology and the Information Have-Less in Urban China*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2009), p4

[313] Maurizio Lazzarato quotes Guattari, "The Machine"

3. Proletarianisation

Introduction

Tian Yu survived the leap in March 2010, but suffered three spinal fractures, four hip fractures, and was left paralysed from the waist down. After returning home in October, Tian Yu could only lie in bed most of the time, and only when her parents were home they could move her to a wheelchair. As Chan writes in her article on Tian Yu, 'Her job at the Longhua factory had been her first, and probably will be her last.'[314] To think that would be Tian Yu's last job undermines disabled people's abilities. In fact, in 2011, Tian Yu learned how to weave fabric slippers from a book gifted by a journalist based in Shenzhen, Chen Yuanzhong. Tian Yu was selling the slippers at 50 Yuan (7 USD) per pair with the help of Chen, who was spreading the word, and Tian Yu ended up selling them through an online Taobao[315] shop. Tian Yu said that before she went to Foxconn, her biggest dream was to open a shoe shop. Being paralysed from the waist down, it is not easy for her to hand weave a pair of slippers that consists of sixty-six steps. 'I first need to cut a piece of cloth into a strip of eight centimetres wide, then add "inner cloth" to the strip, fold the strip and glue them together, and finally iron it, for the cloth to be used for making slippers.' Because of the inconvenience of her movement, usually these preparations will be completed with the help of her family.[316] Tian Yu's slippers, like many other hot news topic, soon cooled down. After a few months, there were very few people who bought the slippers.

When the *nongmingong* returns home, one is no longer a *nongmingong* (peasant-worker) but a *nongmin* (peasant) as designated by their rural *hukou* (household registration). Wage labourers, as well as the unemployed and paupers are all part of the "proletariat cohort" as discussed in Chapter One. The usage of the term *nongmingong* is preferred over directly using established English terminologies such as "proletariat" to project a

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[314] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p85

[315] Founded by Alibaba Group in 2003, Taobao Marketplace facilitates consumer-to-consumer (C2C) retail by providing a platform for small businesses and individual entrepreneurs to open online stores that mainly cater to consumers in Chinese-speaking regions (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan) and abroad, made payable by online cellphone accounts, and where stores usually offer an express delivery-service to their clientele. Taobao, as a Chinese online shopping website, is the world's biggest e-commerce website and the eighth most visited website.

[316] Zhang Kaifan, "Paralysed Foxconn survival does not give up, making a living by weaving shoes", Sohu News, 08/04/2011, http://news.sohu.com/20110408/n280180751.shtml [Accessed 5 April 2020]

process that is happening in China. This chapter begins with the investigation of the Chinese terminology *nongmingong* that was introduced in the last chapter in relation to proletarianisation. In the process of subalternisation, the *nongmingong* takes on the potentiality of the term "subaltern". This chapter focuses on the challenges and specificities posed by the process of proletarianisation with its conditioning, rather than identifying class consciousness. With questions of how are people turned into *nongmingong*? What is the process rather than who is the proletariat? The research focuses on the proletarian rather than the proletariat, and engages with proletarian as an adjective that relates to and modifies the subaltern.

The difference between the process of subalternisation and proletarianisation can be understood as a question of movement. The process of proletarianisation in regard to Tian Yu involves a physical movement between the rural country and the city. Whereas the process of subalternisation denies any movement. Through subalternisation, one is cut off from the lines of social mobility. The subaltern is incorporated into the migrant working class through the process of proletarianisation, rather than proletarianisation in a sense of growing working class. Proletarianisation continues to engage with questions concerning a process of conditioning in a machinic sense. By attending to Tian Yu's life since she returned home, the process of proletarianisation highlights the different aspects of machinic conditioning occurring through technological development and economy.

The first part will analyse a process of proletarianisation through the emergence of cyber-proletariat within the Chinese migrant working class who has no consciousness of its own positionality in the society as being working class and does not think of itself as a working class, but whose collective struggle is recognised through the singular subaltern suicides. A problematic raised by the transformation from "a class in itself" to "a class for itself" will be engaged with through the emergence of Chinese migrant workers. This part deals with *nongmingong* as an incomplete position within the layers of proletarianisation and the conditionings that come with the process.

The second part of the chapter examines proletarianisation through the conditioning of technological development and the digital economy, by focusing on the mechanisms of

the global cybernetic exploitation produced by the machine. Since much of the new intensification of exploitation enabled by cybernetic accumulation is borne by non-European populations and women. This part addresses the process of proletarianisation with relationship to China by following how the economy is constructed. In addition, it engages with two dimensions of proletarianisation not only with a view to production, but also with questions concerning consumption.

Since production itself has transformed from not only producing material goods, but also information, the third part considers what production has become and the mode of production in regards to Tian Yu. It exams the proletarianised producer through industrialised production, and the proletarianised consumer through the different stages of a consumerist model and what we are experiencing today. This part draws on Bernard Stiegler's work on the proletarianisation, that focuses on the destruction of knowing-how-to-make/do in relation to the producer, and knowing-how-to-live in relation to the consumer. It looks at contemporary conditioning within the broader view of technological transformation that affect people in their abilities to memorise.

3.1. The Proletarianisation of *Nongmingong*

3.1.1. An Incomplete Position

The process of proletarianisation in regards to *nongmingong* is that it turns agricultural labourers into industrial workers by depriving their means of production. The workers neither own nor control the tools they use; the raw materials they process or the products they produce. As discussed in the last chapter in relation to the idea of citizenship, the urban and rural *hukou* system divides the nation along urban-rural lines, which play an important role in the instituted subalternisation of the rural population through social exclusion. The *hukou* system also takes part in the peculiar process of proletarianisation when the government, whilst incorporating the Chinese socialist system into the global economy, called on rural workers to work in the city but not to stay in the city. The *hukou* system thus disconnects the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation for the *nongmingong* as they have been deprived of the opportunity to live the life in the city

where they work. *Nongmingong* is not proletariat per se, rather it is a position within the process of proletarianisation of our time.

Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin's study on proletarianisation amongst Chinese peasant-workers was published almost ten years ago and covers research from the early 2000s. The first generation of *dagongmei/zai* are the people who were born in the late 1960s and 1970s such as Tian Yu's parents. They were the first to move from the countryside to work in the cities. Tian Yu's father Lao Tian's first *dagong* (to work-for) job was in Beijing on a construction site. He went with six or seven other people, and did not feel unease when arriving in the big city. He thought that it was 'a hundred times better than the countryside'. He had experienced demanding unpaid wages in Shiyan, had his bag stolen in Zhengzhou, and built a factory building along the reeds of the Qiantang River in Hangzhou.[317] When Tian Yu was in the hospital in Shenzhen, Lao Tian could not figure out how to get Tian Yu to stand up; did not understand what "humanitarian" compensation means; why Foxconn would rather spend hundreds of millions on high-rise building's protective nets (the suicide nets), but did not send a manager to ask why Tian Yu jumped off the building.[318] The first generation of migrant workers had no idea of their rights. Even after a system has emerged where the central state would pass a labour law that was somewhat progressive in certain aspects. But none of the migrant workers knew about the labour law. They did not know they had a right of contract.[319] They knew 'the boss has the right to ask you to leave but you don't have rights'.[320]

The desire of returning to the homeland once enough money is earned was stronger for the first generation of *nongmingong*. The term "jieji"[321] (class) is seldom used by the

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[317] Zhang Lei, "Foxconn Female Survivor Tian Yu, Where Is The Youth", Sohu Business, 16/11/2011, http://business.sohu.com/20111116/n325791679.shtml [Accessed 5 April 2020]
[318] Ibid.
[319] David Harvey's podcast series Anti-Capitalist Chronicles published by Democracy At Work. David Harvey, "Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: The Conditions of Labor in China", *Youtube*, 14/03/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xfvx0Ll2IE [Accessed 5 April 2020]
[320] This is said in an interview in 2006 of a female worker in an electronics factory in Shenzhen. Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin, "Unfinished Proletarianization: Self, Anger, and Class Action among the Second Generation of Peasant-Workers in Present-Day China", *Modern China*, Vol. 36, No. 5 (September 2010), pp 493-519, p502
[321] *Jieji* can be literally translated as step level.

nongmingong[322], as they consider themselves different to the socialist workers – usually in the north of China – produced by the state. This is what Pun and Lu call an incomplete proletarianisation where becoming *nongmingong* is becoming incomplete as a "quasi" or "half-" worker in the industrial word.[323] The process of proletarinisation of *nongmingong* is becoming incomplete within the class position.

The second generation of *dagongmei/zai* are the migrant workers who had grown up in the reform and opening period, especially those who were born in the late 1970s and 1980s and entered the labour market in the late 1990s and 2000s. This generation is relatively better educated; they have realised that they will always be considered second-class citizens by urban governments, but have also came to understand their rights through for instance listening to the radio programmes on legal rights and work issues, and would take part in a collective action against the employers. The first generation of *dagongmei*, as discussed in the first chapter, appropriated their own labouring body as a weapon through a minor form of resistance in the work place, rather than participating extensively in collective action. The second generation have been taking collective action since the early 2000s. The second generation of *nongmingong* began to negotiate and articulate their own rights. Official statistics show that between 1993 and 2005 the number of protests rose from 10,000 to 87,000 (a 20% increase per annum) and that 75% of these were mounted by workers and peasants. And according to national statistics, the number of labour disputes in arbitration soared from 135,000 in 2000 to 314,000 in 2005, an average increase of 18.4% per year. In 2003, the number of employees involved in labour arbitration reached 801,042.[324] For Tian Yu's generation who were born in the 1990s and 2000s, it had become a norm to *dagong* in electronic factories in the cities, however the collective action in Foxconn during 2010 is manifested through the singular repetition of suicide.

What Marx called "class in itself" is working class objectively, but those that belong have no consciousness of their positionality in society as being working class and do not think

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[322] Pun and Lu, "Unfinished Proletarianization", p495
[323] Ibid. p498
[324] Ibid. p508

of themselves as working class.[325] But the problematic that lies in the process of class formation is the transition from a "class in itself" to a "class for itself". It is useful to return to the passage which is quoted in the first chapter from Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*[326] as it shows that the locally interconnected peasants who lack political organisation embody a class in itself but not for itself. Only the peasants who can have their interest count form a class that is for itself. Marx's statement raises a question in regard to the distinction between a class in itself and a class for itself, in that only a class that than can constitute forms of political struggle is a class for itself. The cyber-proletariat is more than a negation of a transformative class. The cyber-proletariat cohort lacks the awareness and shares no feelings of community amongst themselves, a state of affairs that is due to the different economic circumstances and realities. However, they do share the conditionings.

To have the capacity to call for agency or make one's interest count is a "class for itself" and is what should be achieved through proletarianisation as the Marx quote suggest: 'Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class.'[327] The incompleteness of the proletarianisation of *nongmingong* means that class in itself does not become class for itself. However, through their own way of organising, the different forms of resistance of the *nongmingong* break the problematic of transforming a class from "in itself" to "for itself" in current times. What is more important today is beginning to recognise collective agency regardless of the formation of a transformative class.

In the process of becoming incomplete within the class position, the characteristic of the second generation of *nongmingong*'s way of life is 'a greater disposition toward

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[325] Harvey, "Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: The Conditions of Labor in China"

[326] 'Insofar as millions of families live under conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests, and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class. Insofar as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests forms no community, no national bond, and no political organization among them, they do not constitute a class. They are therefore incapable of asserting their class interest in their own name, whether through a parliament or a convention.' Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Rockville: Serenity Publishers, 2008), p62

[327] Ibid.

individualism, an increased proclivity for urban consumer culture, less constrained economic circumstances and greater pursuit of personal development and freedom, a higher rate of job turnover and less loyalty to their work, and a greater level of spontaneous collective actions at the workplace'[328]. Though they are better off materially, they are spiritually disoriented while having a cosmopolitan outlook. The rapid economic growth in the reform era has shaped a social structure in which the second generation has faced a greater income inequality, further social exclusion, and rural-urban chasm. [329]

3.1.2. The Unfinished Process

The process of proletarianisation of Chinese *nongmingong* is shaped by a spatial separation of production in the urban cities and reproduction in the countryside.[330] The social reproduction of labour in terms of housing, clothing, education, and medical care but excepting farm labour, all depend largely if not exclusively on the incomes from working in the cities. The separation of urban and rural, however, 'has been ceding place to the rise of a dormitory labour regime, which offers a new combination of work and "home" resembles early capitalist work and residence arrangements, and yet it continues to segregate the worker from the city.'[331] During the month when Tian Yu worked at Foxconn, she had never been to the city centre, but only spent her time at Guanlan and Longhua factory plants. She lived with eight strangers in the dormitory, eight people from different provinces, different workshops, different shifts. Migrant workers are thus uprooted. Tian Yu heard Lao Tian talked about the high-speed road, the railway station, the prosperity about the city when he returned home, but she only found herself repeating the same gesture 2880 times every day on the factory shop floor.[332] The reform and opening policy allows the rural subjects to transform themselves into labouring bodies, but at the same time, places severe constraints on the labouring bodies in the industrial environment.

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[328] Pun and Lu, "Unfinished Proletarianization", p495
[329] Ibid.
[330] Ibid. p497
[331] Ibid.
[332] Zhang, "Foxconn Female Survivor Tian Yu, Where Is The Youth"

In contrast to the formation of the English working class in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the process of proletarianisation of Chinese *nongmingong* does not include land enclosure in a physical sense. They were not forced by the state to give up their right to land, and did not withdraw from the means of reproduction as their land was not repossessed altogether. The reproduction in the countryside was maintained as Chinese peasants are able to keep for themselves a small piece of land sufficient to sustain a life of basic subsistence and with the land rights based on the male line of succession, the agrarian population is legally protected. And the cancellation of agriculture tax in 2006 further eased the burden on peasants. Unlike the English working class, the Chinese *nongmingong* faced 'no coercion effectively forcing on them a process of proletarianization'.[333]

Though the reproduction in the countryside is not in the interest of capital exploitation, it does however facilitate the set-up of rural-urban chasm for the *nongmingong*. At the same time, in the cities, they are forced to work under the labour regime that sets up another urban spatial relationship through factory confinement between the city centre and the factory. The subaltern space exists not only in the countryside but also in the factory, where in this new subaltern space the *nongmingong* did not know they had a right of contract, nor did they know what the contracted situation should be at a work place. Without having a contract, they had no ground to litigate at all. All these are caused by the coercive laws of competition. As soon as China inserted itself into the world market, it had to obey the coercive laws of competition, that is, the only way in which China could succeed in the world economy has been through a low–wage economic system and a low wage industrial structure.[334]

What Pun and Lu call the unfinished process of proletarianisation, points to the fact these labouring bodies are disposable, and are always becoming incomplete, becoming *nongmingong* as quasi workers in the industrial world. When they are no longer needed, they are uprooted and asked to go back to the countryside. This is what Lao Tian

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[333] Pun and Lu, "Unfinished Proletarianization", p505
[334] Harvey, "Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: The Conditions of Labor in China"

understood in the end, 'Although in the city, state policies and people's hearts are good, (but) in fact, the city is ruthless. You, this person, have use value, you can survive in the city; if the old, weak, and sick, (originally) belong to the countryside then you have to come back.'[335] In regard to Tian Yu's generation of migrant workers – the cyber-proletariat – the unfinished proletarianisation is a process of constant disposal of the labouring bodies and reincorporation of them back into the work force. This is because the cyber-proletariat has been plucked off the land, taken into the factory; they resisted, only to be thrown out on the street, then entered (or not) into the labour market in a different way.

Nongmingong as a class position is a position of incompleteness within the process of unfinished proletarianisation. The incomplete position conditions the process of unfinished proletarianisation makes it an always ongoing process. Subalternisation cuts one off from movement and the lines of social mobility, whereas proletarianisation takes on a back and forth movement between the urban industrial city and the rural countryside that makes it an unfinished process. Subalternisation at both rural and urban subaltern spaces is renewed through a mechanism enforced by the physical mobility of moving back and forth enabled by proletarianisation. Both of the processes of subalternisation and proletarianisation operate in urban and rural subaltern spaces because of the movement of *nongmingong*, which forces us to consider the overlapping of two different processes. The two processes cannot be separated to say one is happening in rural space and the other is happening in the urban space. They are intertwined and interrelated.

'When female workers reached marriageable age, usually between 22 and 26 years, they would return home, get married, and move into the home of their husband's family, and some of them would end up running a small business in town.' [336] During the 2000s, government policy to promote not only the return of migrants to their hometown villages but also economic development there could not offset the factors affecting people who lacked both experience and skill in doing agricultural business, as well as lacking both material and financial capital necessary for setting up an enterprise. Not to mention the

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[335] Zhang, "Foxconn Female Survivor Tian Yu, Where Is The Youth"
[336] Pun and Lu, "Unfinished Proletarianization", p498

fluctuating market that contributes to the failing of business ventures, which usually leads to one's returning to the city. The lack of opportunities for individual development in the hometown that produces a sense of "land enclosure" where the *nongmingong* go back and forth between the city and the land makes them unable to feel at home at either place. This is a different sense of land enclosure compared to the land enclosure that happened during the formation of the English working class where proletarians were hurled into the labour-market by the dissolution of the bands of feudal retainers.[337] This sense of land enclosure results in what Pun and Lu call the "self-driven" proletarianisation.

The path of proletarianisation that has been taken on by the second generation of *nongmingong* is around the awareness of class position and the participation in collective actions since the *nongmingong* has experienced a deeper sense of anger and dissatisfaction that has accumulated from the initial will to leave the countryside but thereafter, only to face the hardship of factory life; then, the frustration of factory life induces the desire to return home. But there is no place for returned migrants, since *dagong* is considered the only means of survival. The back and forth between hometowns and cities in-between different jobs sets off a process of "enclosure" that has been attached to an unfinished process of proletarianisation of *nongmingong*, which rests on a spatial chasm between production in urban cities and reproduction in the countryside. This spatial chasm separates their mode of living, their interests, and their cultures because they themselves, on the one hand, are working in the cities as quasi workers, and on the other hand, are returning home and not necessarily working as farmers. However, the anger, dissatisfaction and resentment informed every stage of *nonmingong's* actions. The second generation of *nongmingong* not only demand their wages, but also dignity and respect, which shows a class that has begun to articulate itself. This proletarianisation features displacement and transience that could be understood as a contradictory process both of and against capital. As a process of capital, *nongmingong* begins to articulate itself. As a process against capital, because of the going back to the rural hometown to unfinish the process.

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[337] Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p878

3.2. Production and Consumption in Cybernetic Circulation
3.2.1. Networked Communication

The early generation of *nongmingong* moved to the coastal city to build the city, and the following generations moved to the city to work at electronic or assembly factories that are a part of the global supply chain of cybernetic circulation. Apart from applying for jobs at factories' own recruitment centres, many workers come to Shenzhen to find work at Sanhe labour market, which is known for the many Human Resources centres advertising jobs for electronic factories as well as other day-end work. The labour market is where the *nongmingong* searches for whatever temporary work they can find. It is the place where the experience of joining the urban labour forces is being lived. There, the reality of the global techno-economic development that is held up by *nongmingong* becomes evident to me.

I met a woman at one of the centres while I was sheltering from the rain in August 2019. She was sitting next to me and started chatting to me. She told me that she comes to Shenzhen to seek work when her child starts school after the summer holiday. While she was talking to me, there was a group of just recruited workers that were about to leave the centre. The recruitment agent had the workers' ID cards in his hand as he called out loud through a megaphone the name of each person to go up and collect their ID cards. Then each worker gathered the bags and luggage, and headed off to the coach that took them to the factory in the rain. These are the lived realities of the Chinese cyber-proletariat. I didn't feel too out of place there, perhaps the heavy rain set the scene, where the raindrops brought a beat to their moves. I sat there watching the workers running to the coach, some alone, some side by side, some using their bags to cover their head. Many people, many bags were waiting at the centre, for the rain to stop, or for their names to be called, or just because they were a regular here, or for reasons that had nothing to do with finding jobs.

As I walked through the hall, passed the standing advertisement boards, I saw some of the advertised hourly rate was as high as 28 Chinese Yuan per hour, which was about $4, doubled when compared to 2010. Now I realised that must be the crunch time for iPhone 11 and 11 pro's releases. Temporary workers – recruited through contracted agencies –

now make up half of the workforces at Foxconn's Zhengzhou factory in the central province of Henan that produces iPhone 11, and workers work at least 100 overtime hours a month. The temporary recruitment with overtime hours violate China's labour laws as it stipulates that temporary workers shall not exceed 10 per cent of the total workforce and the monthly overtime work hours shall not exceed 36 hours.[338]

Such overtime-hours reveal the temporality of *nongmingong* who are incorporated into the cyber-proletariat cohort due to the market demand. This process of proletarianisation begins at the end of a supply chain, where the deindustrialisation of the global North meets with the rural depopulation of the global South. There is no longer a clean North-South divide since communication that runs the supply chain has become 'as important as electricity once was in the age of mechanical production.'[339] Communication makes clear the reversal of the relation between production and consumption, offer and demand, and that forces a structuring of the productive process in the most flexible way possible, breaking all the rigidities constituted by the employees' working habits.[340]

The networks of supply chain management headquarters research, design and undertake marketing in the high-wage areas of the global economy. At the same time, it 'subcontracts manufacturing, assembly and back-end office functions to newly industrialised territories', and 'sends mining, waste disposal and other indiscreet activities to abyssal sacrifice areas'[341], all of which have become key to the technical composition of a global proletariat. The steam power slashed shipping costs and ICT (information and communications technology) decimated coordination costs for globalisation. Supply chains were forged from cybernetics since telecommunication became cheap, reliable and widespread in the mid 1980s. Email and exchangeable software packages made it easier for corporations to manage work across great distances as ICTs 'made it easy for rich nation firms to combine high technology they developed at home with low-wage

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[338] Phoebe Zhang, "Apple iPhone 11 Launch marred by Claims Foxconn Factory Broke Labour Laws", South China Morning Post, 09/09/2019, https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3026392/apple-iphone-11-launch-marred-claims-foxconn-factory-broke [Accessed 5 April 2020]

[339] Christian Marazzi, *Capital and affects: The Politics of the Language Economy*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1994), p21

[340] Ibid.

[341] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat*, p83

workers abroad.'[342] The bar code – the Universal Product Code – developed by IBM in the early 1970s allows goods to communicate electronically to each other and their owners about their location, destination and price, which allowed communication and transportation to become linked into detailed cybernetic tracking, inventory controls and labour monitoring systems.

Manufacturing production, healthcare, software development and service industries are organised by what has been called "lean production" based on the Toyota Production System to reduce lead times and operating costs by outsourcing labour, therefore reducing contributions to social benefits held responsible for high labour costs. Big companies are reorganising themselves with new technologies and supply chain management in order to respond to shifts in demand, the changing fashion and desires of the consumers in a very short time. And labour is organised in the most flexible way possible of "just-in-time" production. [343] Thus communication and its productive organisation as information flow have been brought directly into the production process of lean production to eliminate overproduction and avoid excess stock.

Supply chains with intricate supply-and-production networks manage their cybernetics with planning systems either developed by corporations themselves or technology companies such as Microsoft that offer automated alerts as markets move, and simulate scenarios to assess the impact of replacing suppliers, switching transportation modes, establishing new routes, increasing product prices and dealing with sudden labour troubles. Supply chain management reaches down to cheap labour and resources, moves commodities through every stage of commodification from production to final sale, with the capacity to identify actual or potential problems and route around them. [344] Radio Frequency Identification – a further development of the bar code tags – enables the tracking of commodities, workers and consumers within the global supply chain. The

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[342] Richard Baldwin, ed. Robert C. Feenstra and Alan M. Taylor, "Trade and Industrialization after Globalization's Second Unbundling: How Building and Joining a Supply Chain Are Different and Why It Matters" in *Globalization in an Age of Crisis: Multilateral Economic Cooperation in the Twenty-First Century*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p180
[343] Marazzi, *Capital and affects,* p19
[344] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p84

consequences of forging supply chains are the drain from old industrial centres to new export zones, the moving of car production plant, shipyards, textile factories, chemical processing, and electronics plants such as Foxconn in Shenzhen.

I was sitting amongst everyone who was at the one end of this networked communication, waiting to be called upon to the factories to move commodities with minimum costs and maximum speeds. The woman asked me which factory I wanted to go (apply for), I said Foxconn, and she went on about how the managers at Foxconn treated some of the workers so terribly by shouting and cursing at them. Especially the boys who get scolded casually. And I thought what about the girls?

> 'I didn't make any mistakes on the products, but the line leader blamed me anyway ... I saw a girl who was forced to stand at attention for hours for supposedly making an error. Public humiliations occurred several times during the working month.
>
> After work, all of us—more than 100 people—are [sometimes] made to stay behind. This happens whenever a worker is punished. A girl is forced to stand at attention to read aloud a statement of self-criticism. She must be loud enough to be heard. Our line leader would ask if the worker at the far end of the workshop could hear clearly the mistake she has made. Oftentimes girls feel they are losing face. It's very embarrassing. Her tears drop. Her voice becomes very small … Then the line leader shouts: 'If one worker loses only one minute [failing to keep up with the work pace], then, how much more time will be wasted by 100 people?'[345]

It dawned on me, that, with all that have been discussed on the conditions of working at Foxconn in this thesis. It is the very topic *nongmingong* job seekers discuss at the labour market. These conditions not only affects Tian Yu, but so many others. This is their lived reality. What I have been discussing is around the conditions, the exploitations, the realities. Whereas the *nongmingong* are discussing within the conditions, the exploitations, the realities. The exploitation of *nongmingong* through networked

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[345] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p90

communication is only one of those conditionings that the cyber-proletariat has to live with.

3.2.2. The Two Dimensions of Proletarianisation

The response of the capitalist class to the uprisings of 1968 for individual liberty, freedom and social justice was to try to satisfy wants, needs and desires by moving towards a much more consumerist society with what Harvey calls "compensatory consumerism". What compensatory means is that happiness is created by using consumer products for the workers who have a miserable time in the labour process at their work places. Compensatory consumerism was one of the answers to the alienations which were being experienced in the workplace.[346] It produced the idea, in the west since the 1970s and 1980s, of a reasonably affluent working class who take their vehicles and go on vacations. When the workers were facing automation in the factory, capital may not have increased the wages but it did lower the cost of all those consumer goods. Technological advances at work places and factories enabled capital to produce more and better with less human effort. The savings in manufacturing and working time increased purchase power. The wages were stagnant, but one could buy at an increasing rate because of the Wal-Mart economy and the general decline in costs of consumer goods. And the ones who lost their jobs due to automation were employed to perform other activities such as leisure activities which were previously not considered to be part of the economy.

Bernard Stiegler poses the question of proletarianisation without limiting the concerns to the working class. He is concerned with the producers, whose activities has been rendered meaningless and shallow through the process of externalising gestures of labour in industrial machines. He is also concerned with the shift of the economy and the way it has been structured, with increasing importance placed on consumption. Thus he raises questions of the proletarianisation of consumers. Through the externalisation of affect

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[346] David Harvey, "Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: Alienation – Part 2", *Youtube*, 03/10/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKAeER1WOuE&list=PLPJpiw1WYdTPmOmC2i3hR4_aR7omqhaCj&index=4 [Accessed 5 April 2020]

and desire in advertisement and mass media, the harnessing of the labour power of workers is annexed, as well as the attention and libidinal energy of consumers.

> 'In order to amortize the huge productive apparatuses constituted in the development of machinism, industry has since the beginning of the nineteenth century progressively installed a "society of consumption." Such a regime is meant to address the problem posed by permanent innovation: the necessity to absorb new industrial productions for which society is not spontaneously prepared. Industrial society presupposes the permanent modification of the behaviour of individuals, who are less and less citizens and more and more consumers; the commodity has become the main operator of the socialization of individuals, and it is in this respect that the media are essential to industrial democracies. Media outlets are vectors conducting society toward the permanent adoption of consumable novelty by means of which capitalism subsists.' [347]

Many of the products which were entering into the compensatory consumerism were not good quality products as capital does not want these products to last for a long time with the aim of creating new fashions. And many of these products sold to consumers such as household technologies are to be used to save time and labour. But it did not turn out to do that at all for the consumer. It has actually increased the rate of exploitation of the labour force as women save time from household chores to enter the labour market because their husbands' wages are stagnating. The household technology is created to penetrate the sphere of "reproduction" with the proposal to save time and to liberate households from household chores. But the time saved in performing domestic tasks would have to be spent working (or working extra time) at the factory or the office. The people purchase these services and appliances that allow them to save time even though producing these services and appliances takes more time than the average person will save by using them.[348]

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[347] Bernard Stiegler, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark Hansen, "Memory" in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p77
[348] André Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, (London: Verso, 1989), p4-5

The laboratory of consumption shifts the condition of the US consumers as well as the global constellations as North America's proletarian began to buy cheaply imported goods from China, through multi-income households since women entered paid work that made up for declining wages and debt. In 2003, China became the second largest exporter of goods such as clothing, shoes, toys, furniture, appliances, light engineering goods and electronics to the United States. Many of these Chinese factories are at the bottom of global supply chains of transnational corporations whereas the manufacturing jobs in North America were being either automated or offshored by the 1990s, causing wage stagnation. But the US consumption continued at a high level, consistently ranked at the top of global per capita household expenditure.[349] The expansion of consumer demand has been absorbing much of the surplus productive capacity that exists in a capitalist economy. And the role of these goods is to create an ever-expanding short-term market that does not last for very long.

The time saved in traditional economic activities has been used to economise activities previously excluded from the economic sphere as deindustrialisation has shifted employment towards service jobs. North American workers began to work in the sphere of circulation, selling to other consumers through jobs including advertising and other promotional activities. Wal-Mart replaced General Motors and became the largest employer in the US. Wal-Mart's 'combination of low-wage workers, even lower waged suppliers, rock bottom prices and big corporate profits encapsulated the dynamics of the US economy'.[350] The network of supply chain management was increasingly becoming defined as a path for the circulation of commodities out of production, towards consumption, streaming advertising, capturing sales and tracking consumers.

Since China's reform and opening, public sector jobs have been phased out whilst innovation and entrepreneurship have been encouraged to be self-sufficient, and individual wealth re-contextualized as part of an immense national effort to "catch up" with levels of development in the West. Localised informal micro-finance became crucial

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[349] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p88
[350] Ibid.

to the business culture. Chinese credit cards as well as western credit cards were introduced by the state in the 1980s. China has been supported by a huge increase in credit creation to purchase homes to absorb the huge investment that was put into construction and infrastructure, with housing infrastructures in particular. And the one-child family's purchasing power became comparable with that of those in the West, since a consumerist model became the mode of organisation desired by the state. The relaxation of *hukou* was in large part an attempt to address the mobilisation of the reserve army of consumers as suggested by Alison Hulme. It enabled more people from rural populations to live and work in coastal areas in order to provide them with the opportunity to be part of the growing urbanised army of consumers. The creation of new welfare facilities since the late 1990s – such as unemployment insurance, medical insurance, workers' compensation insurance, maternity benefits, pension funds, and healthcare – all had the same aim.[351] So the lack of secure public sector jobs caused careful saving for things such as child care when many state-owned factories stopped providing their own kindergartens for their employees, alongside reliance upon credit. And amongst the poorer sections of Chinese society who were less confident of their earning ability, it became the careful spending of careful savings.

When Tian Yu was working twelve-hour days with a single day off every second week at Foxconn, her only leisure activity was to go to the supermarket. She would put things into the shopping basket one by one, and then put them back on the shelves one by one. "There is nothing happy or unhappy about it", Tian Yu recalled.[352] Before rural population and *nongmingong* became a part of the urbanised army of consumers, they were a part of "*reserve* army of consumers". They were "reserves" because they were yet to have the purchase power even when they were working, and because they could be disposed of as labouring bodies through the unfinished process of proletarianisation. The expansion of a reserve army of labour was seen as an inevitable outcome of the process of capital accumulation by Marx. As capital accumulates, workers are thrown out of employment

[351] Alison Hulme, *The Changing Landscape of China's Consumerism*, (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2014), p xxiv

[352] Li Zao, "Foxconn Female Worker Who Jumped From the Building Seven Years Ago: 'I Only Work Eight Hours A Day Now.'" *Initium Media*, 02/08/2017, https://theinitium.com/article/20170802-mainland-Foxconn-factorygirl/ [Accessed 5 April 2020]

into a reserve army. In turn, capital also needs a reserve army of labour in order to accumulate.[353] Marx was concerned more with the expansion of capitalism inevitably drawing more and more people into a labour reserve of potential, marginal and transitory employment, rather than the identification of any group of workers as particularly vulnerable. He did not consider women as a group in his reserve army of labour model. Over time, women's labour power has become an important part of the industrial reserve army and the notion of women as a reserve army of labour has come to mean whether or not women bear the burden of unemployment in the time of crisis, whether women are more "disposable".[354] Like the young female migrant workers who reach marriageable age then return home, and the woman I met at the labour market who come to Shenzhen to find work only when her child start school after the summer holiday. They are part of the labour reserve of temporary employment.

The phrase "reserve army of consumers" refers to consumers standing in for labour to integrate the rural population into the consumerist model that makes the buying and selling of goods and services the most important social and economic activity. The notion of "reserve army of consumers" has come to mean how the rural population of China are turned into an economic subject without them having to work for a wage. Even though they lack purchase power, they still have the function of consumers. Tian Yu's window-shopping at the supermarket shows a process of re-subjectivation that is not about the money you can spend to make you a consumer, but a matter of the subject you can become.

The rural population are not only members of the reserve army of labour who move back and forth to the cities to enter the labour force or are being laid off by employers. They are also members of the reserve army of consumers even though it might be hard at the beginning to mobilise the material consumption due to generational cultural attitudes when it comes to spending. But as Tian Yu says: "Internet technology and mobile

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[353] Marx, *Capital Volume I*, p784

[354] Irene Bruegel, "Women as a Reserve Army of Labour: A Note on Recent British Experience", *Feminist Review*, No. 3 (1979) pp.12-23, p13

communications has opened a window on the wealthy, wonderful city lifestyle for us".[355] Industrialisation is defined as the separation of producers and consumers. The internet has modified this situation so that the producer and consumer opposition is no longer imposed. Members of the reserve army of consumers might not spend in monetary value but can consume online to generate data profit but without being paid. Members of the reserve army of labour might not be employed but are prepared to work for low wages in temporary jobs.

Production and consumption no longer constitute a functional opposition since the consumerist model has altered the stakes and definition of work. The definition of work was conceived in accordance with an industrial model that used to rest on the coupling of production and consumption. The nineteenth century industrial capitalism of the productivist was founded on the steam engine and on the iron rails of railway networks and is superseded by the twentieth century consumerist model founded on the steel industry, the petrochemical industry, and on road networks. Since both of the productivist and consumerist industrial models became global, the current industrial model has now disintegrated to the precise extent that it exists in the economic and functional integration of production and consumption.[356]

3.2.3. Internet Economisation

Cybernetic de – and recompositions of class are examined by Dyer-Witheford by focusing on the role of the Internet played in reconfiguring the relation of American and Chinese proletarians, a reorganisation that set the scene for the 2008 crash. The computer network Arpanet built by Arpa was created with a military motivation for bringing computing to the front lines. In the early phases of the Internet, the policies of the US National Science Foundation that officially managed it, excluded commerce from its use for "research and education", which means the Internet existed as a "temporary autonomous zone" for it to be envisioned as a space to escape reality. However, the

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[355] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p87
[356] Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p23

Internet has become deeply connected to the development of late post-industrial societies as a whole. Since the commercialisation of the Internet from the 1990s, the initially tiny Internet population first steadily increased and then suddenly started growing dramatically: in 1997, 18% of the US population had Internet use at home, but by 2000 this had risen to 41.5%, and by 2011 to 71.7%. [357] Much of this is understood to be attributed to the decreasing costs of digital devices, a result in part of low-wage production in China. And as the number of online users grew from the 1990s, the Internet became a potential arena for commodification, and a new frontier for corporate expansion between Microsoft and Netscape over the control of technology giving easy access to the World Wide Web. 'The subsequent digital gold rush involved many actors: the computer sector, producing the software and hardware; telephone and cable carrier conglomerates laying wired and wireless connections; retail and business-to-business (B2B) sectors, trying to transcend bricks-and-mortar; media companies racing each other to find digital channels for entertainment and news; the pornography business, persistently at the leading-edge; early search engines, mired in ranking scams and portals; eBay's online auctions; and the growing world of e-advertising, vital to many of these experiments, soon spawning its own specialized agencies.' [358] From there, venture capital raised high-risk money for investment in dot-com companies. Some investors bought stocks they knew were overvalued, online day-traders and credible financial advisors "pumped and dumped" worthless stock. The rising stock prices supported profit-less development, but dot-coms failed to meet financial targets, and the bubble burst in April 2000. Between March 2000 and October 2002, NASDAQ the high-tech stock market index lost nearly 80% of its value.

The basic flaw of the dot-com bubble was that digital consumers did not consume enough due to the growing numbers of Internet users who expected online service to be free. The early Net's un-commodified origins set the practices of non-commercial sites, and what Richard Barbrook described as a "gift-economy" (gifts of time and ideas) that reproduced

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[357] U.S. Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, "Computer and Internet Use in the United States, Population Characteristics", *U.S. CENSUS BUREAU*, Issued May 2013, https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/p20-569.pdf [Accessed 5 April 2020]
[358] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p89

and circulated digital content without regard to intellectual property laws. In the 1990s, not-for-profit networking, hacker culture's "information wants to be free", peer-to-peer networks like Bit Torrent were impossible to repress and were ideal for unauthorised copying. With the appearance of Wikipedia and Free and Open Source Software whose "copyleft" practices countered Microsoft and other corporate software producer, "cyber-communists" seemed to be pragmatically 'engaged in the slow process of superseding capitalism in cyberspace'. [359] But soon digital capital resurrected itself and subsumed itself to the networks. Commodification, the re-imposition of a regime of property is the main strategy through which capitalism tries to reabsorb the cyber-communism of the Net into its folds. The new commercial domains took the form of Web 2.0 such as Google and Facebook and mobilised unpaid "user-generated content", either as the passively provided raw material processed by search-engine users or as active contributions to various forms of social media. These voluntary and unpaid practices that had previously frustrated Web 1.0 capital were transformed into a new form of cybernetic accumulation, which included users' data traded to third parties and used for target advertising such as for the US presidential campaign.

Tiziana Terranova argues that cultural and technical work is central to the Internet and is not exclusive to the so-called knowledge workers, but is a pervasive feature of the post-industrial economy. She questions the legitimacy of a fixed distinction between production and consumption, labour and culture; the Internet does not automatically turn every user into an active producer, or turn every worker into a creative subject.[360] When Tian Yu became out of work from the manufacturing sector, she was incorporated into the Internet economy. While she was doing rehabilitation treatment in Xiangyang in 2011, the Magic Bean Mother charity in Wuhan started training classes in Xiangyang. The local Women's Federation contacted her and helped her to sign up. Tian Yu's mother pushed her in the wheel chair to the class every day. Tian Yu took a week of Taobao basics course and came home to open her first Taobao shop. But it did not last long. She wrote: "At that

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[359] Dyer-Witheford quotes Richard Barbrook, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p91
[360] Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy", *Social Text*, 63 (Volume 18, Number 2), Summer 2000, pp33-58, p35

time I was quite confused and very closed off. I felt hopeless for the future. I was sure it would be like this forever."[361]

Free online labour for Web 2.0 capital is one of the manifold forms of shadow work through which capital supplements surplus value extracted through the wage, a process van der Linden and Roth see as always having been constitutive of capitalist proletarianisation and that now takes fresh form at a new level of technological subsumption. [362] The gift economy, as part of a larger digital economy, is itself an important force within the reproduction of the labour force in capitalism as a whole. As the provision of "free labour", it is a fundamental moment in the creation of value in the digital economies. [363] Social media activity such as Facebook posting as a form of exploitation constitute a regime in which 'the user is habituated, on pain of exclusion from social worlds, to surrendering the elements of their personality – identity, creativity, sociality – to enhance the circulation of capital… it is a form of subjectification that is both infiltrative and extroversive in the abject submission to the commodity form it elicits'. [364]

The connection between the *dagongmei* (female migrant worker) who spends her "pre-marital life cycle" on the assembly line and the American woman who discovers Facebook "knows" her engagement even though it was never announced is that the *dagongmei* creates the material basis of the social media platforms that generate voluntary labour for digital capital which in turn propels further low-wage physical exploitation of electronics workers. The American Facebook user benefits from the exploitation of the *dagongmei* by using the computers she produced in China's factories. At the same time, one of complementary exploitations, in which the computer made by the *dagongmei* becomes the means for the Facebook user's surrender of free labour and subjective subordination to the commodity form.[365] Each exploitation drives the other, and both constitute the process of proletarianisation again in two dimensions. The *dagongmei*, the

[361] Li Zao, "I am Tian Yu, I want to start again in 2018", Jian Jiao Bu Luo, 10/05/2018, https://www.jianjiaobuluo.com/content/12018 [Accessed 5 April 2020]
[362] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p92
[363] Terranova, "Free Labor", p37
[364] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p93
[365] Ibid.

proletarianised producer through the precarious proletarianisation of the hard, corporeal and material toil; The Facebook user, the proletarianised consumer whose libidinal energy is exploited but who, at the same time, is also a proletarianised producer who generates labour online for free.

3.2.4. 2008

This cycle of exploitation continues and propels further proletarianisation when the speculative financial bubble burst in 2008. The 2008 crash is an important conditioning in the process of proletarianisation. Previously, the high-tech low wage global economy did not generate enough purchasing power or profits to provide adequate investment opportunities. Dyer-Whiteford sees the commercial exploitation of the Internet depended on investment that led to the boom and bust in 2001, and the subsequent 2008 housing bubble financially instrumentalised through sub-prime mortgages as two moments of one single episode. Since the mid 1990s, the Internet was connecting investors directly to trading activities, and linking exchanges internationally, and risk is speculated through computing that leads to algorithmic trading. This cybernetic apparatus that drives financialisation operates directly onto the class composition as the American workers 'sought to compensate for their falling incomes at work by participating in the housing bubble'. In the mid 2000s, close to 10% of American disposable income came from extracted equity (mostly refinanced mortgages), boosting consumption despite falling wages through which sub-prime mortgages was the ultimate disastrous manifestation of this dynamic.[366] The dot-com crash generated the low-interest-rate policy which fed the housing bubble. Sub-prime mortgage was in a form that was calculated to benefit finance capital and was more likely to be offered to African and Hispanic Americans who had been previously excluded. But this inclusion is calculatingly fostered and ruthlessly exploited by capital.

> 'What sub-prime mortgages demonstrate is finance capital's opportunistic
> exploitation of the extreme political decomposition of the US proletariat
> after the collapse of the mass worker. This decomposition was taken as an

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[366] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p96-97

occasion to develop new forms of financial expropriation that targeted the most vulnerable members of the class. And such financial expropriation was, once again, connected back to the workplace exploitation of Chinese workers. For fuelling the North American housing boom was a financial flow between US banks and housing agencies and East Asian manufacturing in which profits from Asian exporters were recycled into the US mortgage market. It is now generally accepted that investment from China and Taiwan significantly pumped up the housing bubble (Duncan 2012). There is thus a trans-Pacific circuit which connects the exploitation of the *dagongmei* in Shenzhen with the eventual evictions of the sub-prime mortgage-holding proletarians in Detroit, Cleveland or Stockton.' [367]

The American workers with stagnant wages are getting by through consuming cheap goods and computers from China, at the same time, by growing debt including via credit cards and mortgages. The debt bubble was swollen by investment funds flowing into the dollar from China-based capital profiting from the influx of the super exploitable migrant labour into export factories.[368] The cheap electronics produced by the *dagongmei* provide both the links in the supply chain that bound the Chinese migrant worker to the assembly lines, and the cybernetic financial apparatus operating upon the African American and Hispanic proletarians by sub-prime mortgages.

China did not follow the steps of the "agricultural revolution - industrial (transportation) revolution - medical and health revolution" compared to Britain, the US and western Europe. The priority was to introduce industrial technology, and medical and health technologies from other countries. Because if the industrial sector does not catch up, the country will face the exchange of low-priced agricultural products for high-priced industrial products as in South American countries. So without completing the agricultural revolution, China entered the stage of industrialisation and the widespread adoption of medical and health technologies. These therefore cause the two problems, first, the rural migration to the industrial sector which leads to a serious shortage of agricultural

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[367] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p98
[368] Ibid. p100

productivity in a given period. Secondly, the introduction of health care systems and technologies has brought about a general increase in life expectancy, which puts more pressure on food demand. Hence the introduction of the one child policy in 1980.

The Chinese government is keen to encourage spending in order to maintain economic growth following the 2008 global downturn with falling demand from the US and Europe. The encouragement of spending is to create a reserve army of consumers, who can absorb the surplus production necessary if China is to maintain its growth rate. A fall in growth, which has happened in recent years, 'is a concern not only in the pure economic sense, but also socially, as it inevitably means loss of employment which in turn has led to civil unrest in recent years.'[369] 2008 also demarcated China's Internet economy. The global crash crashed the consumer market in the US, which meant the factories in China that produced the cheap goods that fed the consumer market were in recession. Around 30 million jobs were lost in 2007/2008, which resulted in labour unrest and many companies going bankrupt, not paying wages they owed for six months. By 2009, a survey carried out by the IMF and ILO shows that the net job loss from the crash of 2007/2008 in the US was around 14 million people, while the net job loss in China was 3 million.[370] China created 27 million jobs in one and a half years through investing heavily in infrastructural development where, since the beginning of the 1990s, funds had been invested in order to overcome the crisis. After 2008, China tripled its consumption of cement to the point where between 2009 and 2012 China consumed more cement than the US consumer in 100 years. It did suppress the economic downturn. But the consequence is that, except for some areas with long-term vision, the national economic restructuring that should have begun failed to come about. And the manufacturing industry, which should have continued to accumulate innovation, either lacked the corresponding source of funds or was biased by short-term prices. 2008 was a very critical year for China's Internet economy. The imbalance between external crisis and internal economic structure suppressed manufacturing upgrades. Concerns about employment at the policy level

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[369] Hulme, *The Changing Landscape of China's Consumerism*, p xxii

[370] David Harvey, "Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: The Significance of China in the Global Economy", *Youtube*, 28/02/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQk5zd4Y1A0&list=PLPJpiw1WYdTPmOmC2i3hR4_aR7omqhaCj&index=21&t=0s [Accessed 5 April 2020]

brought unexpected space for the expansion of the Internet economy. And the large amount of infrastructure investment laid the foundation for the Internet dividend for the next decade as it increased the level of infrastructure such as roads and high-speed railways, which the Internet economy depended on. As well as the reform of the telecommunications industry, this opened the door to broadband networks, while the construction of large-scale base stations laid a solid network foundation for the Internet economy. [371]

At the same time, the rapid urbanisation that began in 2008 aided more migration of the population from rural areas into the city, as well as the consumer capacity of the Chinese economy that needed to be built to overcome the debt financed by the infrastructural investment. After the short-term blow of the financial crisis, the land prices and housing prices (whether residential or commercial real estate prices) began to rise after 2008. New instruments were also created for people to finance the purchase of housing. The financial sector suddenly became an area in which money was being expended on lending people to build housing and at the same time being lent to consumers to purchase the housing.[372] The rising land and housing prices squeezed the profit margin of the manufacturing industry, and the profits from the low-end manufacturing industry through the stores became thinner and thinner, as did the profit of traditional stores. The middle to low-end manufacturer gradually lost the opportunity to transform to the middle to high-end mark, and finally turned to e-commerce for survival. Before 2008, China's Internet was still dominated by traditional online businesses, mainly relying on games and advertising. After 2008, with the rapid development of public transportation, a basic network and the number of Internet users, Alibaba and JD.com expanded rapidly, and the e-commerce platform became the beginning of O2O marketing for Internet companies. [373] O2O means "Online to Offline" but also "Offline to Online", indicating the two-way flow between physical retailer and online e-commerce, but also between brand marketing and shopper or point-of-sale marketing efforts to influence purchase decisions. The term was initially

[371] "It's Time To Thoroughly Reflect On China's Internet Economy", *Huxiu*, 21/05/2018, https://www.huxiu.com/article/244983.html [Accessed 5 April 2020]
[372] Harvey, "Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: The Significance of China in the Global Economy"
[373] "It's Time To Thoroughly Reflect On China's Internet Economy"

applied to QR code marketing efforts, which is widely used in China from taking the code scanner to online platforms, to offline payment.

3.3. Proletarianisation Through the Digital Economy

3.3.1. Hypermaterialisation

Since 2012, Tian Yu spent two years in a very confused and hesitant state where she did not do much at home, she started reading and painting in order to pass time. In 2014, Tian Yu was encouraged to take on a training course in order for her to return to the labour force through a different kind of mode of production that placed her at the other end of the cybernetic supply chain.

> 'So in October 2014, I went to Wuhan Sunshine Training School to start a cloud customer service course. During that time, my father would get up at 6 o'clock every morning to take me to the main road with the truck from the construction site, and borrowed the neighbour's motor tricycle to take me to the bus station. It is not very convenient for me to get on and off the bus. My mother would take me on her back to get on the bus. It was very hard. Later, we took the train to Wuhan, and the barrier-free facilities were much better. The back door of the bus in Wuhan is very wide and can be used to lift the wheelchair directly. We took the bus to Qingshan and I spent ten days at the training school. The ten-day course is free, but we have to pay for the travels and accommodation. The school has free lunches, some people did not turn up, so they gave us the left over too. My mother and I would use the microwave at night to heat it up.' [374]

Since then, Tian Yu has got a job working as an online customer service agent for a snack company that sells on Taobao, with a monthly salary about 2000 Yuan (285 USD). She works in front of a computer in her bedroom every day, from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM with half an hour lunch break.

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[374] Li Zao, "I Am Tian Yu, I Want To Start Again In 2018"

Customer service offers a personalisation to the customer of mass consumption. By offering this service, it also collects the data regarding the consumer through the payment method, address and online profile. Taobao customer service has a set of very strict assessment criteria including the amount of daily reception, response rate, response time, customer conversion rate and so on. This labour process is digitally monitored and surveyed, alongside work captured inside the network with the flow of information. Tian Yu has to deal with two or three hundred customers every day. During "Double Eleven" (November 11th, also known as "Single's Day", the online and offline shopping festival similar to Black Friday), the number of customers would reach more than one thousand. Tian Yu feels that this job is much better than the one in the past – an eight-hour working day with breaks, with a bonus upon full attendance every month.[375]

The process of proletarianisation through the digital economy reconfigures production and consumption in relation to value, and free cultural/affective labour is discussed through discourses around early knowledge worker and immaterial labour[376]. Online customer service agents are digital workers; for some digital workers, they are the cultural elite, for others they are a new form of proletarianised labour.

> 'Immaterial labor, unlike the knowledge worker, is not completely confined to a specific class formation. Lazzarato insists that this form of labor power is not limited to highly skilled workers but is a form of activity of every productive subject within postindustrial societies. In the highly skilled worker, these capacities are already there. However, in the young worker, the "precarious worker," and the unemployed youth, these capacities are "virtual," that is they are there but are still undetermined. This means that immaterial labor is a virtuality (an undetermined capacity) that belongs to the postindustrial productive subjectivity as a whole.'[377]

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[375] Li Zao, "Foxconn Female Worker Who Jumped from the Building Seven Years Ago"
[376] It is Maurizio Lazzarato who first coined the term immaterial labour as a way of conceptualising capitalist transformations and grasping changes in the concept of production. But he soon abandoned the idea and hasn't used the term, because he finds immaterial labour as a concept was filled with ambiguities. He was never able to resolve the theoretical complication between the material and the immaterial. Bojana Cvejić, "Conversation with Maurizio Lazzarato" in *Exhausting Immaterial Labour in Performance*, Joint issue of *Le Journal des Laboratoires* and *TkH Journal for Performing Arts Theory*, (no.17), October 2010, pp. 12-16, p12
[377] Terranova, "Free Labor", p41

Since the 2008 meltdown, the youthful western "immaterial labour" found themselves out of a job and with no prospects. Customer service work captures large pools of information, and customer reviews produce social and cultural knowledge that becomes information and feeds back to the development of an economy of the hypermaterial. What Stiegler calls "hypermaterial" is a process where information – which is presented as a form – is in reality a sequence of states of matter produced by materials and apparatuses, by techno-logical dispositifs in which the separation of form and matter is also totally devoid of meaning.[378] Hypermaterialisation describes a form of everyday reality where material appliances transform everything into information and subject it to endless transformation. In the hypermaterial fields, matter is always already form, and form is always already information. Matter is being rendered informationally. Information is sliced into nano-second and nano-scale and turns into informationalisation via the digital dispositifs. So the "dematerialisation" of the economy is a hypermaterialisation: the infinitely small and the infinitely short. Matter becomes invisible, not immaterial.[379]

When Tian Yu was at Foxconn, she made no friends, no one spoke to her after she spent a whole day trying to locate her wage card. Tian Yu has never met the online customer service colleagues in person, but she sometimes chats to them online.[380] There are many daily communications for Tian Yu, including dealing with the hundreds and thousands of customers. As discussed earlier, communication has taken on a role that adjusts the mode of production. In the case of customer service, it makes clear the reversal relation between offer and demand, production and consumption. Berardi argues info-labour is essentially a labour of communication, which means communication put to work. Tian Yu's communication with her colleagues online is an enrichment of experience. But her work with the customers can be seen as an impoverishment, 'since communication loses its character of gratuitous, pleasurable and erotic contact, becoming an economic

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[378] Excerpt of Bernard Stiegler's *Economie de l'hypertatériel et psychopouvoir* translated in English, published on Technophilia. "On Immateriality", *Technophilia*, 04/01/2012, https://technophilia.wordpress.com/2012/01/04/on-immateriality/ [Accessed 5 April 2020]
[379] Ibid.
[380] Kong Lingjun, "Seven Years Since Shenzhen Foxconn Survivor Tian Yu Went Home", Shanghai Observer, 28/07/2012, https://www.jfdaily.com/news/detail?id=60530 [Accessed 5 April 2020]

necessity, a joyless fiction.'[381] For Berardi, info-labour – whereby people who sit in front of a screen repeat the same operation a thousand times every day – is in a way similar to work of industrial workers. However, Tian Yu's assembly line work of inspecting the iPad screen and putting a sticker on it all within 15 seconds, and her online customer service work with a set of very strict assessment criteria share similar hard, corporeal, and material toil. But at least she does not have to face the presence of a bully line manager when she is working in front of her screen at home. Nevertheless, her attendance is digitally monitored. When the electricity was cut off at her home for a day, she lost the full attendance bonus for the month.[382]

Tian Yu's online customer service job puts her back to the labour force of cyber-proletariat, and folds her back into the layers of proletarianisation, specifically through the hypermaterialisation of the digital economy. To use the term of cyber-proletariat here is to not forget Tian Yu's Foxconn assembly line job, as well as the time she was out of work. The term is engaged with an analysis of cybernetic capital concerned with not just the info/digital/knowledge worker, but the relationship between contemporary global workers. The cyber-proletariat of capital's machinic conditioning of the human, is defined by the existence of large surplus populations, in and out of temporary and precarious employment. The cyber-proletariat is a segmented proletariat, commonly subordinated to capital, but divided in ways such as Tian Yu's Foxconn experience and customer service work.

3.3.2. The Transformation of Memory

As the profits from Asian exporters were recycled into the US mortgage market to pump up the housing bubble, the production of *dagongmei* in Shenzhen is connected with the purchasing of the homes of sub-prime mortgage-holding proletarians in the US. The 2008 crisis for Stiegler is a consequence of the exploitation and functionalisation of a new

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[381] Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), p86-87

[382] Li Zao, "Foxconn female worker who jumped from the building seven years ago: 'I only work eight hours a day now.'"

energy, which is not the energy of the proletarianised producer (labour as pure labour force), nor the motor energy of a new industrial apparatus (such as oil and electricity, which are placed into the service of the steel industry and the culture industry). But a new energy of the proletarianised consumer, that is the consumer's libidinal energy. The exploitation of consumer's libidinal energy 'changes the libidinal *economy* and, with it, the economy *as a whole*, to the point where the former is destroyed just like the latter, and the former *by* the latter'.[383]

When Tian Yu first sold her hand-woven slippers in 2011, the cost of express delivery from the nearby town was very high. Now the improvement of infrastructure in China provided the basis for logistics. The weak manufacturing industry made a large number of original manufacturing labours redundant, which in turn provided a large number of labour resources for express delivery, warehousing and other industries. Since then, many service platforms have risen to meet the domestic needs, catering, commuting and entertainment in the process of rapid urbanisation and hyperindustrialisation. The road networks of carbon-time and mobility founded on the consumption of hydrocarbon are now simultaneously running with digital networks of light-time (dominated by the issues of access to electronic networks and of digital automation) [384] and the development of an economy of the hypermaterial. From 2008 to 2012, China's minimum wage levels have registered an average 12.6 per cent annual growth rate, in part a response to rising worker protests, and in part an attempt to stimulate domestic consumption.[385]

On 27th August 2019, I landed in Shenzhen Bao'an Airport in the evening. I couldn't remember much of how I got to Shenzhen. I flew from Bangkok. I ate some warm sushi before boarding the plane. Actually, the queue at the border control was long and messy at Bangkok Airport. Did I sit by the aisle? I really don't remember. I went on Google photos, and remembered that I sent a photo to my mother after I landed. This reliance on artificial memory aids feeds into a process of cognitive and affective proletarianisation that makes me feel vulnerable to manipulation of the technologies of memory, which are controlled

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[383] Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, p25
[384] Ibid. p23
[385] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p95

by industries intent on exploiting my desire for their gain. The displacement of memory renders my memory the object of knowledge-control, that positions memory as the mnemotechnological system. Artificial memory is a pharmakon. In ancient Greece, the term pharmakon is a composite of three meanings: remedy, poison, and scapegoat.[386] In Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy", the notion of writing is a pharmakon; writing threatens true ideas by offering a representation of truth that need not contain true ideas, yet it is an addition or supplement to true ideas that allow them to be communicated. Instead of memorising, to write is to rely on external memory supports. A book as an external carrier helps us to turn to something that is said without having to learn it by heart. Thus artificial memory is a pharmakon, a gift that is also a threat since dependence on artificial memory makes the training of my own memory less imperative.

The photo I sent to my mother as a self-expression is also a self-exteriorisation. Our memories are finite so we require artificial memory aids, and an ensuing ecology of "natural" and artificial memory, of *anamnesis* (the process of recollection or remembrance without having to rely on external memory supports, i.e., a speech) and *hypomnesis* (the making-technical of memory that involves an external carrier, i.e., a book). For Derrida, technical exteriorisation or supplementation is an intrinsic irreducible dimension of the logic and function of memory. Once we stop memorising speech by heart, we lose the capacity and instead rely on the written script or text. Such technical contamination of memory allows memory to be historicised through technics of grammatisation, of the stone tool, of ideogrammatic writing, of the alphabet, of printing, of analogue and digital recording, and now of digitisation and the Internet.

What Stiegler, following Derrida, calls "grammatisation", is the exteriorisation of memory in the form of discrete marks, traces, or *grammata* that forms the hypomnesic milieu for anamnesis.[387] The stages in the process of grammatisation, (from the stone tool… to the

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[386] The first and second senses refer to the meaning of pharmacology, while the third sense refers to the pharmakos ritual of human sacrifice. "Pharmakon (pharmacology)", *Ars Industrialis*, http://arsindustrialis.org/pharmakon, [Accessed 5 April 2020]

[387] Mark Hansen's introduction to Stiegler's "Memory". Bernard Stiegler, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark Hansen, "Memory" in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p66

Internet) are different historically-specific configurations of anamnesis with technics, individually and collectively demonstrating there is no memory that is not hypomnesic. Thus, the process of grammatisation is the *technical history of memory*, in which hypomnesic memory continually reintroduces the constitution of a tension within anamnesic memory.[388]

Grammatisation involves discretisation as writing breaks into discrete elements of the flux of speech. With question to industrial production, grammatisation in relation to a process of production is that as during the industrial revolution, the process of grammatisation suddenly surpassed the sphere of language and came to invest the sphere of bodies. The gestures of producers were discretized in view of their automatic reproduction. The workers' knowing-how-to-make/do (*savoir-faire*) is destroyed through the simplified production process, as they perform a particular discrete gesture as part of the production chain. Such as Tian Yu's role on the assembly line is to inspect screens that hurt her eyes. This is why Stiegler discusses the loss of know-how-to-make/do (*savoir-faire*) and know-how-to-live (*savoir-vivre*) through grammatisation. What Stiegler deals with is proletarianisation through a process of grammatisation. Through the process of grammatisation, whereby the currents and continuities shaping our lives become discrete elements. [389]

'The question of the proletariat and that of a process of grammatization in which, now, it is the consumer who is deprived of memory and knowledge: it is to study the stage of a generalized proletarianization brought on by the generalization of hypomnesic technologies.'[390] Proletarianisation through the technical history of memory is when current hypomnesic technologies such as smart technologies are generalised: on the one hand, the cyber-proletariat is proletarianised by adopting a motor behaviour by passing one's know-how into the machine and thus being alienated from the means of production. And on the other hand, the proletarianised consumer who consumes through these technologies is deprived of memory and thus knowledge.

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[388] Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, p31
[389] Stiegler, "Memory", p70
[390] Ibid. p71

Memory is always a question of mnemotechniques. What Stiegler calls the transition from mnemotechniques (methods of memory storage) to mnemotechnologies (technology that systematically orders memories) is the transition from individual exteriorisations of memory functions to large-scale technological systems or networks that organize memories. Memories as forms of knowledge are now objectified in everyday objects and apparatus, which engender a loss of knowledge at the same time as "knowledge societies" and "cognitive" capitalism are being discussed. The grammatisation of gesture of the loss of know- how during industrial production has continued with digital apparatuses to a point where all forms of knowledge will be grammatised in the guise of cognitive mnemotechnologies. [391] Mnemotechnological apparatuses such as mobile phone displace a greater part of our memory.

> 'By then it was the middle of March 2010, and after more than one month in Shenzhen I had spent all of the money my parents had given me. Where could I borrow money? At this moment of crisis my cellphone broke. I was unable to get in touch with my cousin in Shenzhen, my sole link to home and family. I could find no one to help me.' [392]

When Tian Yu went to Shenzhen, Lao Tian and her cousin each gave her a mobile phone. But one broke and the other was stolen. She did not have a phone to call her family after not being able to locate her wage card. The proletarian use of mobiles – to search for work, handle emergencies, communicate in migration – are ways to individually cope with and adapt to, rather than collectively change, the conditions of precarious proletarianisation amongst the world's "surplus populations". [393]

But the loss of mobile phone made Tian Yu realise that she had lost her sole link to home and family. 'To lose a cell phone is to lose the trace of the telephone numbers of our correspondents and to realize that they are no longer, or perhaps never were, in psychical memory but only in that of the apparatus.' [394] Tian Yu produced iPad, a form of

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[391] Stiegler, "Memory", p70
[392] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p91
[393] Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Proletariat,* p17
[394] Stiegler, "Memory", p68

hypomnesic technology that links international exchange, cybernetic tracking and stored memory. But when she lost her mobile phone, she lost her sole link to home. 'The question of hypomnesis constitutes the preliminary approach to proletarianization, insofar as the proletariat is an economic actor without memory and, so, without knowledge.'[395] Here, Tian Yu is not only a proletarianised producer without knowing what an iPad was, but also a proletarianised consumer without memory, and, so without knowledge. Memory is the pre-condition of knowledge, as well as practical knowledge. The sole link to home, through the back and forth movement between countryside and the city, the spatial separation of the urban/rural, factory town/city centre, the intertwined process of sublaternisation and proletarianisation, was lost when Tian Yu's mobile phone broke. The sole link is the hypomnesic technology that is the external carrier of her memory. Tian Yu's ability of knowing-how-to-live (*savoir-vivre*) is thus destroyed. And she is a proletarianised consumer without memory and knowledge.

After collecting my luggage, I used my phone that was well prepared with enough data this time, to order a car from Didi (a taxi and private car booking app) to pick me up from the airport. Didi monopolises the automobile travel market in China. On the app, it tells me where the meeting point was, and amongst many other people, I followed the signs indicated at the airport to the long sidewalk with probably more than 10 pick-up points. I looked at the people around me: we were all making the same gesture of looking up for the car and looking down at the phone to see how far away the cars were. 'If what we call industrialization, broadly conceived, is the generalization of a mnemotechnological reproducibility of the motor behavior of producers, hyperindustrialization is the generalization of a mnemotechnological reproducibility of the motor behavior of consumers.'[396] The gestures of the consumers are now discretized to a few taps on the screen, to look up and look down. No cash exchange at the end of the journey, no friction.

After exchanging a few messages with the driver, I got into the Didi taxi, which was an electrical vehicle. In the car, there were three screens showing three of the same

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[395] Stiegler, "Memory", p71
[396] Ibid. p69

navigations. One was imbedded in the dashboard, one was something like a 10-inch tablet that comes with the car, as well as one that was showing on the app of the driver's smart phone. How much of the same technology does one need for them to perform the one task? We were tracked three ways. The pharmakon here is the reliance on the navigations that form the remedy for finding the way, but also as a poison to the driver who no longer needs to know the city by heart. We were lost in the navigations just before finding the hotel. In the case of the literal synthesis, one cannot be a reader without being able to write; in the case of analogue recording, one can – and typically does – receive audiovisual messages without having the ability to produce them oneself. [397] The Didi driver is a receiver of the instruction from the navigations, at the same time he produces the service by driving. Industrialisation is defined as the separation of producers and consumers. The Internet no longer separates the function of the producer and consumer, as 'once it has reached the hyperindustrial stage, the exteriorization of memory and of knowledge at once furthers their limitless impact and strengthens the forces that can implement their control.'[398] The driver remembered all the sentences he needed to perform in an ultra professional way: please this please that please don't forget this and that. And I am remembering the taxi driver who took me to Foxconn for the first time three years ago who helped me out when he was worried that I wouldn't find my way back, because I did not have a mobile network.

'Thus exteriorized, memory becomes the object of sociopolitical and biopolitical channels of control; as a result of economic investments on the part of social organizations, psychical organizations get reconfigured as elements of and by means of mnemotechnical organs, including machine tools and other automata, including household equipment.'[399] The household technology that is supposed to save time and labour ends up increasing the rate of exploitation of the labour force; similarly, the consumer exteriorises ones knowledge of how to do the chores to the household equipment. With the proliferation of the car apps, the journey from the airport to the destination no longer needs to be figured out or written down before landing. 'Knowledge becomes discreticized through

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[397] Stiegler, "Memory", p77
[398] Ibid. p69
[399] Ibid. p71

technologies and industries of language processing, user profiling.'[400] Airport signs are organised by the route to the pick-up points, and the users and producers are discretized. Anyone can become a "taxi" driver as roads no longer need to be memorised. These are the currents that shape our lives and make us pass our know-how into the machine that comprises the hyperindustrial service economies.

3.3.3. Shenzhen Realism II

The next day, I went to Huaqiangbei commercial district that is known as the electronics market. Huaqiangbei is the name of the area that used to be industrial, mainly producing electronics, communication and electrical products and with more than 40 factories. The Shenzhen government seized the opportunity and began to transform Huaqiangbei in 1998. The area has now transformed from a manufacturing district to a consumerist district, and is the world's greatest electronic market with a total of 1.45 square kilometres. The origin of Huaqiangbei's electronics market is related to the development of globalisation when China first opened its market after the reform and opening policy. As early as the preparation period of Shenzhen Special Economic Zone, the electronics industry was regarded as the leading industry for processing materials. From 1979 to 1980, the electronics industry resources from both mainland and Hong Kong had been converging around the intersection of Shennan Avenue and Huaqiangbei. The construction of Shenzhen Electronics Science and Technology Building started in January 1981 and was completed in August 1982. It is Shenzhen's first landmark and its completion made the electronics manufacturing industry the largest industry in Shenzhen at the time.

Huaqiangbei is understood as a well-developed ecosystem where one could buy all the parts that are needed for an iPhone and have it assembled for less than one fifth of the Apple retail price. I entered the building of Huaqiang Electronic World from the entrance facing the underground station. The ground floor has retailers selling household electronics, there wasn't anything memorable on that floor. I went up by using the escalator, the first and second floor was full of small venders with their glass cabinet

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[400] Stiegler, "Memory", p70

selling small tech-y goods from USBs to headphones to LED light to anything Bluetooth connectable to rear view mirrors that has a recording function to drones. Some venders that are tucked into the sides don't seem to care about the business from the passer-by. Their store fronts are just full of boxes waiting to be picked up. One more floor up, it seems to get more specialised. There are areas dedicated to computers, gaming computers, bitcoin mining computers and repairs. Another floor up has smart homes showrooms, home robots, smart household technologies, smart plugs and so on. By this point, I decide to go downstairs. I start to think about what my purpose of coming to the Electronic World is. I don't need any of these things. But when I get to the floor that sells a bit of everything, I start to think, should I buy something? How about the USB stick with the cartoon cover? I didn't buy anything in the end and went down from the escalator. I realised I must have taken a different escalator whilst going down because the area below was different to the entrance I came in from, and it excited me. It is an area with more of a market outlook that has more traffic of people with their trolleys looking between rows of small booths of venders, suppliers, factory shop that are selling all kinds of specialised electronic parts such as inductor, ferrite bead, diode, transistor, network filter, etc. There were delivery people carrying around boxes; venders napping on cardboard box on their booth. Once I saw this area, I was satisfied. Because this is the so called ecosystem I had been hearing about, that one can rely on to build whatever from scratch. Because these are the parts we don't see from the fully packaged automated lifestyle upstairs. And because these are the inner workings that build the infrastructure which supports the cybernetic circulation and accumulation.

The previous transfer of labour from manufacturing to the service industry is the result of coping with the 2008 crisis, and is not because the peak of the manufacturing industry had been reached. By this point, China recognised the impossibility of building a vigorous economy through the low-wage, high-labour forms of industrial production. Labour intensive industries do not actually gain the benefit of their labour intensity because there is a transfer of value from labour intensive industries to capital intensive industries. So the capital intensive centres of the world end up receiving more value than they actually

produce through free trade and the equalisation of the profit.[401] The labour intensity in China has been supporting the centres of capital intensity. China is now moving towards a capital intensive production and a similar trajectory can be found in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan who all moved from labour intensive production to capital intensive production. The other reason for the transfer to capital intensive modes of production is that the reserve army of labour in China is drying up since the adoption of the one child policy. Capital intensive forms of production depend upon high technology. Therefore, China is not only relying on the Internet economy monopolisation through low-value service industries, but also producing high-value goods in order to change the economy. Now China has been accused by Trump for stealing the kinds of high technology such as 5G from the US. The US had previously been willing to transfer technology to Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, so that China could not compete with capitalist development during the Mao era.[402]

The day after visiting Huaqiangbei, I took the metro to Longhua where I visited the Foxconn Longhua plant in 2016. This time, I wanted to go the labour market before going to the factory. On the overground train, I took a picture of the advertisement banner on top of the carriage window. There were two ads, both from a training centre. One reads "…qualification, transfer to Shenzhen household registration, come find Cosin (training centre)". Another banner reads "One Yuan ($0.14 USD) per day for university education, financial aid fulfil my university dream!" The dream, the Shenzhen dream is evoked once again.

When Tian Yu found herself out of a job after returning home, she took a Taobao basics training course to get herself back onto the labour market. At Sanhe recruiting centre, the second floor up are all dedicated to a training centre (Sanhe Professional Education) that offers courses on training to be qualified as or for make-up artists, psychological counsellors, accounting software applications, corporate trainers, e-commerce specialists,

[401] David Harvey, "Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: Trump's Attack on China", *Youtube*, 17/10/2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XntjW8JXss&list=PLPJpiw1WYdTPmOmC2i3hR4_aR7omqhaCj&index=6 [Accessed 5 April 2020]
[402] Ibid.

human resources managers and multimedia software applications. I was told by the employees there that the psychological counsellor course had now stopped due to certificate regulation. Under the neoliberal global governmentality, even when one is out of work, the potentialities of work must be kept alive, the unemployed must undergo continuous training in order to be both monitored and kept alive as the reserve force.

From Longhua metro station to the labour market, I took a bus. Everyone boarded was paying the fare by using their WeChat app. I was prepared with data this time, so I also pulled out my phone, opened my WeChat app, clicked my payment barcode, and faced my phone screen to the reader on the bus. Not sure if the machine on the bus should scan my barcode or I should scan the machine. It was not working. The bus driver turned around and told me that I had to use the Shenzhen travel mini programme in WeChat, which meant I obviously was not well prepared enough. I searched for it in the app but it took a seemingly long time to authorise. So I asked the driver how much was the fare and he said one Yuan ($0.14 USD). I looked into my actual wallet and took a Great British ten pence coin that looks similar to the one Chinese Yuan coin and also is equivalent in value, and slotted it into the toll box.

> 'The more we delegate the small tasks that make up the warp and woof of our lives to the apparatuses and services of modern industry, the more superfluous we will become: we will lose not only our know-how but also our knowing-how-to-live-well. The only thing left for us will be the passivity of blind consumption, devoid of knowledge and its rewards. We will become impotent if not obsolete-so long as knowledge is what empowers humanity.' [403]

I am remembering, before there was WeChat, in 2010, when Tian Yu couldn't afford to take the bus back to Longhua factory from Guanlan factory. She walked the journey that would take more than an hour on the bus.

Compared to the young generations of *nongmingong*, the early generations of *nongmingong* are often portrayed as harder workers in the media, they came and built

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[403] Stiegler, "Memory", p68

the cities by moving bricks and doing all kinds of jobs. They left their children behind who are now being portrayed as the generation who cannot bare hardship. The young generations of *nongmingong* are the ones who live in an age where the Internet is developed and the economy is growing rapidly. They visit internet forums, play games and read online. Some of them know their contractual rights better through the Internet. Some of them got scammed by recruitment agents. Some of them sold their ID cards at the labour market for quick money. Some of them carry huge debts, refuse to go back to their families. Some of them only do temporary one-day jobs, work for one day per week and spend the earned day rate for the rest of the week by lingering in Internet cafes day and night until they run out of money to find another one-day job.

The new form of proletarianisation of the consumer consists in, as Stiegler puts it, 'the organization of *consumption as the destruction of savoir-vivre with the aim of creating available purchasing power*, thereby refining and reinforcing that system which rested on the *destruction of savoir-faire with the aim of creating available labor force*'.[404] The current economic system that integrates production and consumption rests on the total capture of machinic enslavement. Consumption is organised in the way that one might not necessarily have the purchase power but consumption is integrated into consumerism in order to crate purchasing power. As Marx considered, consumption is simultaneously also production and that consumption contributes to the production of some aspect of man. Since production produces not only the object of consumption but also the mode of consumption.[405] Foxconn has adopted a production model where the production process is simplified to an extreme degree.[406] The result is that workers do not need to know how-to-make/do, or to be trained to perform most tasks. In the end, the consumers consume because they don't have the knowledge of how-to-live and what they purchase helps them to live a life. And the producers produce in such alienated labour processes that they take away their knowledge of how-to-make/do. The people who work for one day and spend their wages in the Internet cafes are the proletarianised producers who live in

[404] Stiegler*, For a New Critique of Political Economy*, p27
[405] Karl Marx*,* trans. S.W. Ryanzanskaya, *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p195-197
[406] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p85

insecurity by not knowing what their future job prospects are. The kind of day job they do requires no knowledge of how-to-do/make. They are also the proletarianised consumers who have been incorporated into a mode of consumption without knowing how-to-live. They do nevertheless produce information rather than material goods when they are in the Internet cafes.

The women I was talking to at the labour center asked me if I wanted to get the Foxconn job together with her. She knew a recruitment agent that would give her 100 Yuan, ($14 USD) reward for each person she introduces to work at Foxconn. I asked what she was doing at the centre that day. She replied that the recruitment centre has a dormitory for her to stay over the night so she's waiting for the bus to pick her up to go to the dormitory. She asked me where I was from. I said Hebei. I lied. Tian Yu is from Hubei, but I didn't want to say that. I also didn't have the accent for Hubei. She said that's quite far. I asked about her too, and she came not far from Shenzhen. She said, 'Why not add me on WeChat?' I said, 'The rain is stopping, I want to check out the recruitment center next door, I will come and find you later.'

The sun came out, I did not want to bother taking a bus again, even though I exchanged some coins at the convenient store. So I took a 40-minute walk from a labour market and arrived at the North Gate of Foxconn's Longhua factory plant. Three years ago, when I first came to the factory, I walked through the gate while the security guard was talking to another person. This time, it was a different gate. The way leading to the gate is rather dramatic. The gate is at the end of a bridge and I could see it from when I was crossing the flyover. The circumstance might have changed, but I was still confident that I could get in.

When I got to the gate, there was a row of automatic gates equipped with facial recognition technology. I panicked. I stood afar from the gate and observed the situation. I asked a girl who just came out if I could get in without being enrolled in the system. She said, "You cannot. Whoever you are meeting has to come out to meet you. You cannot go in." I panicked again. I worried that these gates would not have a racial or gender bias. This is a biometric technology put to everyday use and I hoped for it not to be the accurate

version. What if I could not get in? Could I make up an excuse to the guard saying it was a biometric failure? What were the chances? Could I be falsely accepted or rejected as someone else? I wanted to get into the factory as this was the whole point of this trip. So I walked up to it, and the screen reads "verification failed", but the gate opened towards me which signalled the way out, but it opened anyway.

Once inside, I encountered workers straight away rather than fountains and suited business men at the gate I entered from three years ago. It was a little after 5 PM. Many workers were out on the street. I walked past the dormitory buildings, there were still nets closing off the balcony, with cloth hangers on the nets. Not too far into the plant, there was a shopping carnival with food and cloths stalls, as well as electric vehicles with promotional discounts for Foxconn employees. I walked past "Foxconn Unmanned Policing Room", and saw an unpiloted vehicle while crossing the road. After walking past Foxconn Industrial Internet Institute, there were more dormitories with metal bars instead of nettings, with Foxconn Family Development Service Centre on the ground floor that had a banner reading, 'Caring for the floating population'. There were people giving way to an unpiloted vehicle, the unmanned policing room, and the window that sold metal free bras[407]. All these presented a kind of high tech low life in front of me, whereby people had been giving way to the machine in order for it to reproduce itself.

Soon after, I started to recognise my surroundings. I was near the gate that exits to the "Villages in the City" with the densely packed residential blocks that I visited last time. Some of the villages in Shenzhen's city centre are planning to be demolished, which will leave thousands of migrants and their kids displaced. I did not want to bother with the facial recognition gate again, so I did not exit to the village. But many people were exiting, it was dinner time, perhaps people had just finished their shifts. Tian Yu was first taken to the Longhua plant by the company bus from Guanlan plant, with hundreds of other new workers. It was also at 5 PM when she arrived, and saw the setting sun bathing the

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[407] No metallic object is allowed into the workshop.

Foxconn facilities in golden light, as well as thousands and thousands of Foxconn workers pouring out of the factory gate. [408]

> 'They [Foxconn] hire constantly, very much so. In the only month when I was there, another group of new workers were hired after me. Then yet another group came. So many people were hired. I don't know whether it was because too many people had left before the Chinese New Year or what other reason.
>
> If they [workers] couldn't get approval to quit, they left anyway without receiving the monthly pay. They were bored, exhausted and did not want to do it any longer.'[409]

I walked towards the inside of the plant. I saw groups and groups of people, newly recruited, standing in front of the workshop buildings. Some of them still had the contracts in their hands. Some of the groups I saw were separated by gender, groups of young men and groups of young women, waiting. I remembered this quote from Sadie Plant:

> '[…] women have not merely had a minor part to play in the emergence of the digital machines. When computers were vast systems of transistors and valves which needed to be coaxed into action, it was women who turned them on. […] when computers became the miniaturized circuits of silicon chips, it was women who assembled them. […] when computers were virtually real machines, women wrote the software on which they ran. And when computer was a term applied to flesh and blood of the workers, the bodies which composed them were female. Hardware, software, wetware – before their beginnings and beyond their ends, women have been the simulators, assemblers and programmers of the digital machines.'[410]

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[408] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p87

[409] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave*, p84

[410] Sadie Plant*, Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture*, (London: Forth Estate, 1997), p37

There were many new employees lining up at the lobbies of one building, enrolling their facial biometrics. I took the opportunity and went upstairs and peeked at the HR office. I came out of the building, and walked around and saw a woman squatting, eating her food in a bowl, while watching something on her phone that was diagonally placed on the side of a planter. It caught my eye because it was right outside a workshop building. She could not care less. Every street I walked past had workers squatting or sitting on the edge of the pavement with phones on their hands, eyes on their screens, consuming the very technology that they were producing. In machinic enslavement, we are no longer smart phone users, "subjects" who relate to it as an external object. In machinic enslavement, we are connected to the phone and we function as components of the device, as its input/output elements, its simple relays, facilitating the transmission of information, communication and signs. 'In machinic enslavement, we literally form one single body with the machine.'[411] Our time is submitted to commodity-time, and our subjectivities are enslaved to a machine.

The process of proletarianisation has to be questioned as labour undergoes radical change, but the process is also the condition of possibility of consumerism insofar as it entails the proletarianisation of the consumer. [412] Traditional broadcast mass media (phonography and real-time television) dissociate consumption and production whereas whatever the woman is streaming and watching on her phone facilitates to connect consumption and production. The technologies that we are used to consuming can also be used to produce as machinic enslavement considers individuals and machines as open multiplicities. The roles of producer and consumer on this woman here are no longer articulated as oppositions. The destruction of the knowledge and ways of living are enabled through machinic enslavement by constantly putting her into service of the capitalist interest.

After seeing the woman eat, I decided to go and get some food. I went to a noodle bar amongst many other different canteens and eateries. And I remembered that in the past two years there were workers complaining in the online forums that some Foxconn plant

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[411] Lazzarato, "The Machine"
[412] Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, p28

was required to download a set of internal financial loan software including one called Fubao Loan app, which requires a bank card, an ID card and a phone number to be linked to the app to activate the monthly quota. And Foxconn stipulated that Fubao Loan app must be used in order to order meals in the canteen. The app allows the worker to spend in advance and have the cost deducted from their salary. Allowing for the workers to spend in advance would reduce the chance of them demanding for wages if the pay was delayed. Foxconn has about 1.5 million employees in China. Such a large number of people would create huge potential revenue. As for Foxconn, the app can help retain employees' salaries and on the other hand it can charge interest on the loans. Foxconn tests run the online loan business apparatus and facial recognition technology on its own employees, to control as well as capture information from them.

Tian Yu had to swipe her staff ID card at electronic readers at the beginning and end of her work shift. From this trip, it becomes obvious the additional conditions that workers are now subjected to reflect the various updated modes of capturing through different methods of tracking: the use of the facial recognition system to replace ID card and gain access, and company apps to get paid and to spend, rather than a wage card. Philip E. Agre calls these processes that have implication for one's privacy "grammars of action" that are central to the capture model. 'Human activity is thus effectively treated as a kind of language itself, for which a good representation scheme provides an accurate grammar.'[413] Actions are captured and arranged into a sequence through the practical application of computer systems. But through this updated mode of capturing, what is enabled is another level of cut off from interacting with others, possibilities, and above all mobility. From the contactless face ID, to the cashless transactions, which department should one go to if the wage was not being paid at all through an app? When Tian Yu went from Block C10, B1, B2, and from floor to floor of building after building to inquire about her wage card at Guanlan plant, the managers and administrators deflected responsibility, she was unable to find information about her wage card. As she recalled: 'I went from office to office by myself but no one would point me in the right direction. They all brushed

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[413] Philip E. Agre, ed. Nick Montfort, and Noah Wardrip-Fruin. "Surveillance and Capture: Two Models of Privacy" in *The New Media Reader*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2003), pp. 737-760, p745-746

me off, telling me to ask someone else'. Her wage for that month of work was approximately 1,400 Yuan (US$220) consisting of a basic pay of 900 yuan plus overtime premiums.[414]

After dinner, I headed back. On the television in my room, the news on Phoenix channel was airing and the headline read "Rumoured Terry Gou will announce his candidacy", reporting that the founder of Foxconn was to run for presidency in Taiwan.

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[414] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p91

Conclusion

Human beings for sure couldn't compete with a machine. You take a screen from the line, check it, and put it back. How can human match the speed of a machine? I kept wondering. On the assembly line if those people in the front work quickly, those after them must follow the speed and make a lot of items.'[415]

– Tian Yu

When Tian Yu worked as an iPad external inspector, she checked the iPad screen and put it back on the assembly line for the screen to move forward. Yet, she is comparing herself with a machine. Was this "machine" the assembly line she was referring to, or was it the one that would eventually replace her role? Who are those people in the front, and who are those that follow them? The ever-changing machine keeps transforming itself, and people's work is only a residual sub-whole of the work of the machine.[416] People are the ones who are cogs in the wheels, one of the constituent parts enabling the machine to function. People are enslaved to the machine. Tian Yu says, 'when the assembly line starts moving, you literally work non-stop.'[417] Once the machine starts moving, it puts one into service non-stop through a process of machinic conditioning. Machinic enslavement puts producers into service at work and puts today's consumers into service outside of work. In order to reproduce capitalist power, capital depends on lives that are put into service by machinic enslavement.

At the time of writing this conclusion, I am in London, staying at home due to the COVID-19 lockdown. Wuhan, where the outbreak of COVID-19 first happened in China, is the capital city of Hubei province, which is where Tian Yu is from. Viruses such as COVID-19 rely on organisms as hosts in order to reproduce itself. A virus is a kind of machine that depends on organisms and puts lives into constant service for its own reproduction. The virus thus enters into a machinic relationship with people.

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[415] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave,* p84
[416] Guattari, "Machine and Structure", p113
[417] Qiu, *Goodbye iSlave,* p84

China went into a nation-wide lockdown on the first day of the Luna new year 2020. By then, most people including the *nongmingong* (peasant-workers) had gone back to their home towns for the Spring Festival. Once the lockdown in China was relaxed, the *nongmingong* were the first to be called back on the production line. There were 290 million *nongmingong* in 2019 and about 78 million people (60% of those who went back home for the Spring Festival) are now back in the cities, mostly to Yangtze River Delta around Shanghai and the Pearl River Delta where Shenzhen is located.[418] While at Foxconn, since February, the workshops at Shenzhen's Longhua plant have implemented a surgical mask production line to produce enough masks for their workers, in order for them to return to work.

When the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami hit Japan in March 2011, Takeshi Kitano, a Japanese comedian and filmmaker said, 'This is not one incident in which 20,000 people died. It is 20,000 incidents, in each of which one person died.'[419] On 29th February 2020, the leap day of the year, Li Moumin, a 14 year old girl from Henan (located in the central part of China) attempted suicide by swallowing a large number of pills, because she was unable to attend her school's online lessons. Li has an older sister and a younger brother. During the lockdown, all three children in the family needed to attend online lessons from home, but Li 's family cannot afford the cost of three smartphones. The three children had to share one mobile phone, which prevented Li from attending her lessons on time.[420] Li survived the suicide attempt.

The encounter described in chapter three with the woman I met at the labour market, and the woman who was squatting, eating her dinner while watching something on her phone at the same time, and Li Moumin: I can't trace their stories. I don't know much

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[418] Huang Jianqi, "78 million migrant workers have returned to work, accounting for 60% of the return to the village this Spring Festival", Yicai, 7 March 2020 https://www.yicai.com/news/100538250.html [Accessed 27 April 2020]

[419] Michael Hoffman, "The power of bad news", Japan Times, 11 March 2012, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2012/03/11/national/media-national/the-power-of-bad-news/#.XqYz8pNKg0o [Accessed 27 April 2020]

[420] "A girl committed suicide due to being unable to attend online class. Henan: Provide for students in need", Net Ease, 2 March 2020, https://news.163.com/20/0302/17/F6NUOOMH0001875P.html [Accessed 27 April 2020]

about the singularity of their lives. But through the little that I know about them, something resonates with Tian Yu's life. They each, in different ways, made me realise how the machinic conditioning affects them, and so many people differently.

Subaltern is situational. It is a position without identity. Subalternity is produced through subalternisation. It is a singular process in one life, through layers of conditioning produced by a machine that concerns all. The "all" is grasped through the machinic conditioning of the cyber-proletariat. Both of the processes of subalternisation and proletarianisation operate in new urban and rural subaltern spaces. The two processes cannot be separated, they are intertwined and interrelated.

Suicide at Foxconn was deemed as 'foolish, irresponsible and meaningless and should be avoided'. [421] Prior to starting this PhD, I used to always think about what my responsibilities are. This research takes responsibility as a critical endeavour against silencing. It counters silencing by holding onto and working with a recent memory. To work for the subaltern is to bring it into speech, to listen to the subaltern, to respond to it, and to take the responsibility. This research works against subalternity, in hoping to undo the new subaltern space. To work against subalternity is to work from the machinic conditionings that produce the new subaltern space.

On my phone, I went to my Google photos again, (as I did when I wrote chapter three in order to type in Shenzhen), and there is a video that I had completely missed during the writing of the thesis. It was the only video that was taken in Shenzhen in 2017. I had forgotten that in 2017, between two work commitments in Hong Kong, I went to Shenzhen for a day in order to avoid having to apply for a work visa for Hong Kong due to the duration of my stay. The video shows a slogan on a large monument, and the slogan reads, 'Time is money, efficiency is life.'[422] I then went to Taobao to check out Tian Yu's

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[421] Chan, "A Suicide Survivor", p93
[422] This is a widespread slogan of China's economic reform. It was originally a quote from 1981 by Yuan Geng, who was an early proponent of the reform and opening policy.

shop[423], there are two types of item available, both are loungewear, and on one of the tops it reads, "HAPPY FUTURE imagining".

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[423] Tian Yu opened this shop in 2018 after completing an online course for operating Taobao shop with Magic Bean Mother charity. Li Zao, "I am Tian Yu, I want to start again in 2018", Jian Jiao Bu Luo, 10/05/2018, https://www.jianjiaobuluo.com/content/12018 [Accessed 27 April 2020]

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